

THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION

STORIES

DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

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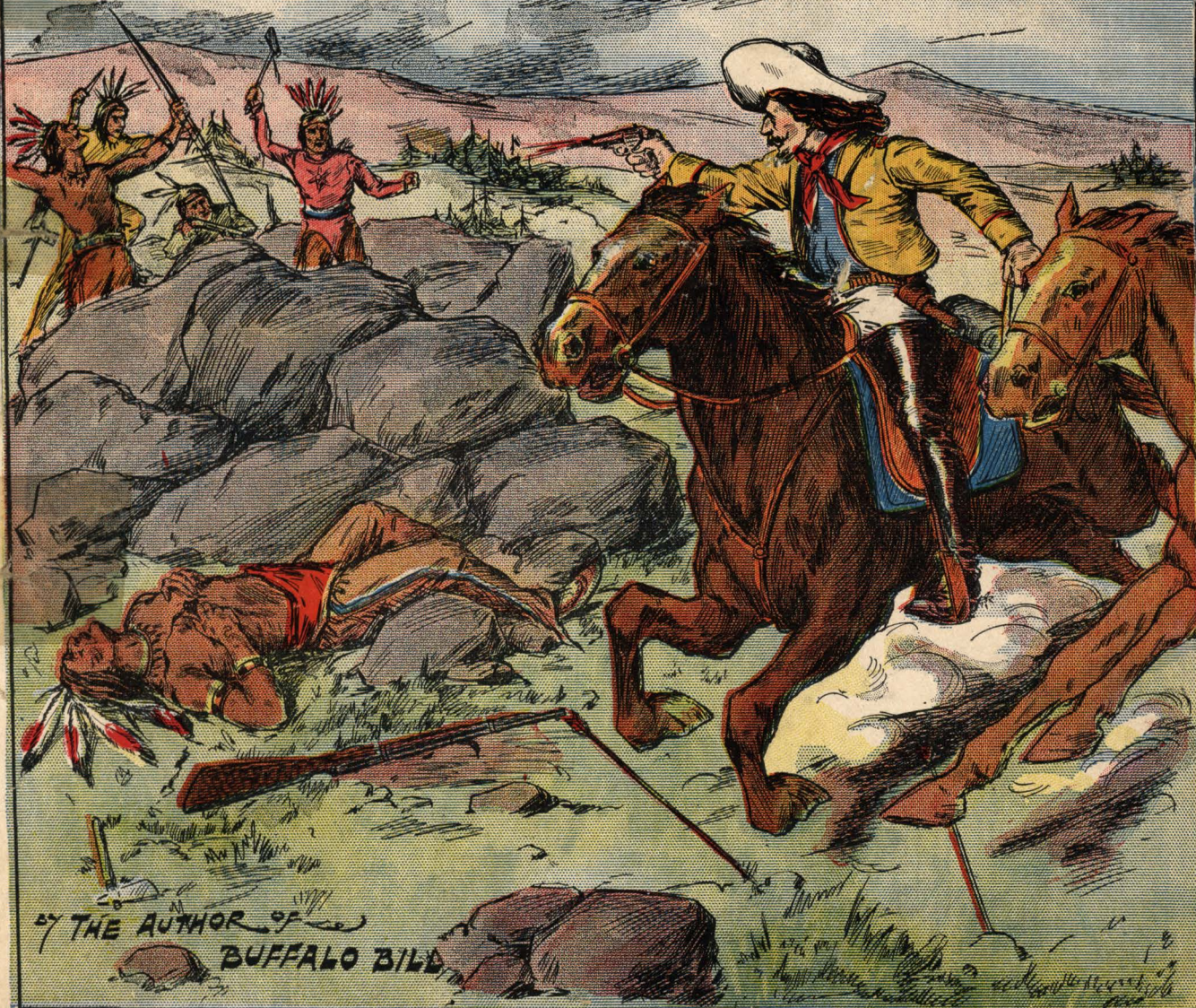
NEW YORK, AUGUST 4, 1906.

M. LINE

Price, Five Cents

BUFFALO BILL'S DIAMOND MINE

THE BEDOUVINS OF THE PLAINS



BY THE AUTHOR OF
BUFFALO BILL

The attempt of the Pawnees to surprise and capture Buffalo Bill was a failure, for he swept by like a whirlwind, his revolver barking out death.



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Beware of Wild West imitations of the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are about fictitious characters. The Buffalo Bill weekly is the only weekly containing the adventures of Buffalo Bill, (Col. W. F. Cody), who is known all over the world as the king of scouts.

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HARPER & BROS. PUBLISHERS

BUFFALO BILL'S DIAMOND MINE;

OR,

THE BEDOUINS OF THE PLAINS.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

CHASED BY PAWNEES.

Well mounted, picturesquely garbed, with head erect, and keen eyes searching his surroundings, Buffalo Bill cantered slowly along.

At his side rode a young man, who lacked the easy equestrian ability of the great scout. His face and hands were not so tanned, and he had that indefinable air of inexperience which one always exhibits when in unfamiliar surroundings.

Yet that he had accompanied the scout on this perilous quest was proof of his courage.

The Pawnees were still the Bedouins of the plains, contesting their supremacy with the fierce Sioux, and white men ventured out into what was then the "Great American Desert" only at the peril of their lives.

About the great scout and his youthful companion was the wide valley of the Upper Platte, and the far-reaching plains that extend to the great mountains.

Close up by the sand-choked stream rose ragged sand-hills, like those which fringe the shores of many an ocean. The reddish broom-sedge floated in the prairie

wind, mingling with the coarse grass that covered the hills. Cottonwoods grew along the river at intervals, with here and there clumps of stunted willows.

Occasionally there were rocky ridges, and these were particularly noticeable as the horsemen galloped into and across a small stream that here became a tributary of the Platte.

"I think I'd like a look at that paper again," said the scout.

The young man took from an inner pocket of his coat a yellowed, time-stained bit of writing-paper. Apparently it had been torn from a note-book, and the writing on it was in faded penciling. The paper was in tatters, and falling to pieces by reason of long exposure to the weather.

Buffalo Bill took it and spread it out on the horn of his saddle.

This was what he saw:

"I'm surrounded here by Pawnees, and the end can't be far off. Somebody may find this, and it may talk for me when I'm no longer able to talk for myself. The diamonds are . . . my daughter
Nellie. . . T. J. BENTON."

Pieces had been torn and worn from the paper by the weather, and the message was incomplete.

"He was killed, of course, by the Pawnees," said the young man, as the scout passed back the paper.

Instead of answering, the scout drew rein suddenly, having made a startling discovery.

His roving eye had caught the gleam of a painted head-feather behind a rock on the crest of a ridge close at hand on the right.

He struck his horse with his heels, and lashed that of his companion.

"Ride!" he commanded sharply.

A revolver leaped into his hand.

But the discovery and the movement had not been made quick enough.

A rifle flamed from behind the rock, and the young man pitched forward on the saddle-bow.

The scout caught the scared horse by the rein.

"Hold hard!" he shouted to the swaying man.

But the latter pitched over stiffly to the ground.

The ledgy and rock-strewn ridge was now alive with Pawnees, who had been lying in ambush there, and who were eager for the scalps of the great Long Hair and his companion.

One of them leaped out to grasp the scout's horse by the bridle.

He paid for his recklessness with his life, dropping dead almost under the feet of the horse, from a pistol-shot sent by the scout.

Though they had brought down his companion, the attempt of the Pawnees to surprise and capture Buffalo Bill was a failure, for he swept by like a whirlwind, his revolver barking out death.

The ponies of the Pawnees were behind the hill. Some ran for them, while others sprang out and sought to follow the scout on foot, shooting at him with rifles and bows.

Both horses were wounded. The led horse was so badly hit by arrows that Buffalo Bill soon abandoned it, riding on and leaving it to its fate.

He wanted to go back to the aid of the youth who had tumbled from the saddle, but he knew that if the young man was not altogether dead, he would be slain and scalped in short order, and, besides, to return to help him was now out of the question.

For from behind the ridge came galloping Indians, yelling fiercely and confidently.

They were sure the horse ridden by the scout was hard hit.

The led horse had fallen to the ground almost as soon as the scout dropped its bridle-rein.

It was now a race for life, with the chances apparently against Buffalo Bill. His horse was bleeding from a number of ugly wounds.

However, he was himself still unharmed, though arrows had gone through his clothing, and one still stuck, swaying, in the crown of his hat, its feathered shaft looking not unlike an Indian head-feather, as it rose above his head.

Notwithstanding its wounded condition, the horse held up well. It was a Kentucky thoroughbred, with unrivaled speed and bottom. Urged on by the scout, its tremendous burst of speed began to leave the smaller Indian ponies behind.

The sun was already sinking, with night not far away.

If the horse could but hold its own until darkness, the scout felt that he would be safe.

But after a time its strength began to fail.

The Indian ponies began to decrease the distance. Soon they were so near that their yelling filled the air. A rifle cracked, and the bullet came singing over the head of Buffalo Bill.

"A little longer, my good fellow!" he cried, still urging the spent horse.

It had exhausted its strength.

In leaping a gully, it fell, sprawling out as it went down.

The scout saved himself from a nasty tumble by taking his feet quickly from the stirrups and springing out of the saddle.

He landed on his feet, still unhurt.

The Pawnees were not now more than a quarter of a mile behind him.

In his desperation, Buffalo Bill drew his revolver and fired it again and yet again into the coarse dry grass that lined the gully on that side.

The grass took fire from the burning powder.

Under cover of the smoke, he began to run along the gully, heading toward some rocks he had seen before the horse fell.

On the rim of the gully, between him and the Pawnees, the fire flared up fiercely, with a dense smoke. Its roar, as the wind caught and tossed it, was almost loud enough to drown the yelling of the Pawnees.

Buffalo Bill ran now with almost the swiftness of the thoroughbred, racing for the shelter of the rocks while the smoke screened him.

There was grass in the gully, and it pleased him to see the fire flash down into it behind him.

That destroyed the trail he had not time to conceal.

The roaring fire on the gully's edge stopped the Pawnees. To reach the gully they were compelled to ride round in a big semicircle, so that, by the time they had gained the point where lay the now dead thoroughbred, the gallant and clever scout was out of sight.

Having gained the rocks, he dropped down there, and then began to creep along under their cover, with the smoke still aiding him.

Grass grew among these rocks, and if the fire came on in that direction it would also destroy his trail here. Nevertheless, he took pains to conceal it.

Soon he heard the baffled yells of the Pawnees, as they rode about, trying to discover his trail.

But the fire out where they were increased so that they were driven away from the gully soon, and this still further aided the daring scout.

The sinking sun had been turned by the smoke to a ball of red copper. When it sank, a little later, it shone through the smoke like a disk of dull flame.

The scout still hurried on, putting more space between him and his persistent foes.

Fortunately, night comes quickly on the great plains after the sinking of the sun. Darkness falls without much intervening twilight. The smoke-pall hastened the coming of night.

The sky behind him, in the west, was now lit up with a red glare of the fire, which showed the smoke in spirals and pillars of wavering black mixed with red flame.

At last Buffalo Bill sank down behind a rock. He was panting from his terrible run. Sweat bathed his

face and body, and his strong frame trembled, for his exertions had been almost superhuman.

He did not yet feel safe, for the keenness of the Pawnees was proverbial. They were the best trailers of the plains, able to follow human footprints with almost the tenacity of bloodhounds.

The scout held his revolver ready in his hand, and listened.

He hoped he had baffled the human demons who had chased him.

But his reflections were not all of himself and his danger.

He thought regretfully and sadly of the young man who had been his companion, and who had fallen under the Pawnee fire.

He felt like condemning himself for not discovering the ambush sooner.

He had thoughts as sad for another—a young woman, to whom this youth had been much, and he asked himself how he should be able to report to her what had occurred.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER THE CHASE.

When, after a night spent in hiding, Buffalo Bill descended from his post of retreat, the Pawnees were apparently gone.

A sudden thunder-shower in the night, which had drenched him, had put out the fire before it had traveled far.

Yet, apparently before that time, it had driven back the Pawnees. Probably they believed he had fallen a victim to the fire he had himself kindled, and so had ridden away. He was grateful, if that were so, for to be free from the persistent search of the Pawnees was an indescribable relief. He felt peculiarly helpless in that sea of grass, on foot, with enemies mounted and known as wonderful horsemen.

Having convinced himself that the Pawnees had departed during the night, Buffalo Bill made his way back to the spot where the gallant Kentucky horse had fallen.

He found its body, blackened and burned by the fire, but the saddle and bridle had been removed by the Pawnees.

In the saddle-pouches was his store of dried beef, so that he was now without food.

He killed a prairie-hen with his revolver, and, finding some charred sticks in the gully, he put them together, lighted them, and roasted the bird.

He had no fear that smoke from this fire would reveal him to the watchful eyes of Indians, for little curls of smoke from smoldering grass-tufts were still rising here and there, and from any one of them the smoke of his fire could not be distinguished.

When he had satisfied his hunger, and his thirst at the river, he set out to walk back to the place where the ambushade had been fallen into, that he might learn the fate of the young man.

Though he had ridden the distance in so short time, the hour was almost noon when he came to the rocky ridge, even though he was a good walker.

Fortunately, as it seemed, the fire had not reached to this point, and he might hope, therefore, that whatever had occurred there could be spelled out in the grass.

On reaching the spot, he found the body of the horse which the youth had ridden.

But the body of the young man was not there.

The horse had not been stripped of its trappings, but lay just as it had fallen, which indicated that the Pawnees had not returned to that point.

Buffalo Bill began to hope that the young man had not been killed, and that he had walked or crawled away, and so he began to search the ground closely for his trail.

But there were no plain footsteps. The grass was trampled, the trampling having been done by the moccasins of running Indians, and by the unshod hoofs of Pawnee ponies.

These marks had so scarred the grass and the sandy edges of the rock ledge that no other trail could be made out.

"There is one way to find his trail, if he recovered and left this place, and was not carried away by the Pawnees," thought the scout.

Forthwith he began to put this plan into execution.

This plan was to walk in ever-widening circles round the ledge, in the certainty that when these circles had widened over a sufficient area to take him beyond the beaten grass, any trail leaving that beaten area could be found.

He spent an hour in thus circling, inspecting the grass with his utmost skill, and there was no more skilled trailer on the Western plains; but at the end of that time he confessed himself baffled.

Buffalo Bill, nevertheless, now covered the ground again, thinking that the young man might have crawled off somewhere, and then succumbed to his injuries.

He called loudly to him, also.

Every device to which the scout could resort was made use of. But these efforts were useless. The body of the youth had disappeared. And whether the young man had been killed, had dropped dead from his saddle, had crawled away and died later, or had escaped, was a black enigma.

While thus searching, the scout came to a singular spring of water.

It was in the sandy margin of the dry tributary of the Platte, at the base of a bush-tangled hill of rock. Here it bubbled up in a strong flow, being a yard or more in diameter.

The scout drank from it, and then sat down to finish the prairie-hen.

As he sat there, eating and thinking, happening at the same time to be looking at the spring, he saw it swell and mount slowly, in a considerable overflow, which for a few moments noticeably increased the volume of the small stream that flowed away from it.

At its highest rising-point, or immediately after it began to subside, big bubbles rose to the surface and broke, and a little cloud of steam, or gaseous vapor, floated upward.

It was a peculiar phenomenon, and attracted the scout's attention closely.

"A thermal or mineral spring of some kind," was his conclusion.

And he began to speculate concerning the future time when, beside this mineral spring, a health resort might arise, to which many people should flock for healing.

Having finished his simple meal, he drank again from

the spring, and fancied he could taste in the sparkling waters some mineral solution.

He had already looked the ground over closely about it.

Now, though he had already done so, he again mounted to the top of the rocky hill that rose just behind the spring, and from that point surveyed the landscape.

"Aha!" he said, as his eyes caught sight of some moving dots on the plains.

He brought out his field-glasses and inspected those dots.

"A Sioux hunting-party, or I'm much mistaken," was his conclusion. "And perhaps that explains why the Pawnees departed in the night, and did not come back to this point for the saddle and bridle belonging to that horse over there."

The Sioux and the Pawnees claimed alike these rich hunting-grounds, and battled for them stubbornly, so that if the Pawnees had seen this band of Sioux, and were fewer in numbers, they would likely get out of the way, or else try to ambush them.

Though he searched the country round, Buffalo Bill saw only that small band of wandering Sioux.

But when he turned his glasses closer in, to the base of the hill on which he stood, he beheld a horse feeding on the grass close down by the river.

"The one thing I need most," was his thought.

He began to study how he could get the horse.

After a few moments he descended from the hill, and hurried to the dead horse, and stripped from it the bridle, rope halter, saddle, and long lariat of rawhide.

The horse he had seen, which he judged to be an escaped Indian pony, was close by a clump of willows, and forthwith he hastened in that direction, and succeeded in gaining the willows without frightening it.

The pony was feeding now close along the edge of the willows, coming toward him, and, with a celerity and quietness that did credit to his marvelous skill, he threw the noose of the lariat out on the grass, and then lay down to await the result, holding the lariat-end in his hand and keeping well concealed.

He saw now that this was a Pawnee pony, for the remnants of a rawhide bridle of Pawnee manufacture dangled from its head.

Had that bridle been of white man's manufacture, Buffalo Bill might have shown himself and tried to coax the horse up to him, but such an attempt with a Pawnee pony would have been useless, for it would have a natural fear of a white man, and, in addition, the Pawnee ponies were notoriously ill-broken and self-willed.

For a little while it seemed that his plan to capture the pony would succeed. It walked straight along the willow fringe, feeding slowly, its eyes on the ground, and all unaware of his presence. The wind was favorable, blowing from the pony to him, so that it could not scent him, a thing he had been careful about when creeping into the willows.

But, when the pony saw the coil of the lariat on the grass, it became suspicious, sniffed at it, and backed away, refusing to walk over it.

He had hoped it would set its feet in the noose, and if it did he counted it his.

The wary pony lifted its head in the air, snorted, and, backing farther away, seemed on the point of running off.

To lose this pony, perhaps the only one he was to see, was a thing not to be considered.

There was but one chance left by which he might hope

to get it. An accurate shot might crease it and bring it down, without seriously injuring it.

There were two methods by which this might be done.

The first method, used by old plainsmen and hunters, was to shoot the horse through the upper part of the neck, back of the head, and rather high over the neck vertebra, the shock bringing the horse down as if it were killed.

If carefully done, the method was good. The horse recovered from the shock in a little while, and the cut wound of the bullet healed rapidly, and made not much of a scar.

Yet for a time such a wound through the neck would weaken the pony, and that was a thing to be now considered.

The other method was to crease its forehead slightly, the bullet merely touching it, as if it were a lance or lightning.

As in the other case, the pony thus struck dropped as if dead, but the wound was but a skin scratch, and in a short time the pony was able to travel as well as ever.

As in the first method, accurate shooting was needed, or the death of the pony would be the result; yet the second method no one but a marksman who could cut the hair-line of a target at fifty yards or more had any business to try.

Buffalo Bill was one of the finest marksmen of the plains. A common feat of his was to toss a coin upward, and strike it with a bullet while it spun in the air.

The attitude taken by the alarmed pony was a beautiful pose, sidewise, with head uplifted and nostrils distended.

Buffalo Bill lifted his rifle cautiously, pointed it at that extended head for but the fraction of a second, and pulled the trigger.

At the report, the pony gave a convulsive jump and sank to the earth, quivering as if shot through the brain.

Buffalo Bill leaped out to secure it, carrying the lariat and the bridle.

He saw that the bullet had but cut the hair on its forehead, scarcely drawing blood, yet now the pony lay as if dying, twitching its limbs.

He noosed the lariat round its neck, forced the bridle into its mouth and over its head, and then, stripping off his coat, blindfolded the pony with it.

By the time he had done these things, the pony began to show signs of returning consciousness.

It drew up its legs with jerking movements, and then suddenly began to struggle to get on its feet.

He let it rise, and when it sought to run he brought it up with a tug of the lariat.

It now began to leap and bound in terror, but he held it by the lariat, and then when it began to tire a little he sprang at a bound to its back, cast off the blindfold, letting it fall to the ground, and sat on the pony as if he were a part of it.

The bounding and capering of the pony was now of the wildest description, resembling the antics of a bucking horse, but Buffalo Bill soon taught it who was master, and after that had been done the victory over it was won.

In less than half an hour from the time of the rifle-shot that brought it down, the pony was under due subjection, and bore the accouterments of the dead horse, as well as the scout, with due docility.

Having subdued it, the scout dismounted again, and examined the wound made by the bullet.

It had bled a little, and the blood was crusting in the

hair, but the blood flow had stopped, and the wound was of a character which would soon heal.

"I suppose you've got something of a headache, old fellow," said the scout, patting it on the neck, "but that will pass away after awhile. I hated to do it, don't you know, and wouldn't if you'd been kind enough to put your foot in the noose I prepared for you. You wouldn't do that; and I had to have you, you see."

He stroked it and patted it, and then again mounted to the saddle.

The Sioux hunting-party had long since passed from sight.

The scout looked round regretfully.

"Too bad, to have to go on and not be able to make a satisfactory report of the fate of my companion," he reflected. "But what can I do? I'm sure the Pawnees killed him. For some reason or other, they carried the body away. That's a sad enough report to make."

Then he rode off, in the direction he had been going when the Pawnee ambush-trap was sprung.

He was thinking of that ambush again, and condemning himself for not having seen it sooner.

CHAPTER III.

BOASTFUL BOLIVAR.

"Cody, my gay gazelle, whither strayest thou?"

The voice came from some cottonwoods close by the river trail, which for some hours the scout had been following, and he drew rein sharply.

A greasy fat man appeared in sight, stepping forth from the cottonwoods—a fat man, whose oily face exuded smiles, and whose whole appearance spoke of easy laziness, cunning, and deceit.

"Bolivar!" the scout cried, staring at the man; for this was the last place in the world where he would expect to see such a person.

Usually Bolivar was found near, or in, some saloon, or round a card-table, for he eked out a precarious existence at cards, and sometimes descended so low that the free-lunch counter, and beer to be had for saloon cleanings, were all he had to support life.

But whatever his circumstances, his buoyancy was usually irresistible.

Yet he was notoriously a coward, and the surprise of the scout was greater because of that, to see him here.

"The same old Bolivar!" he said. "I didn't know but you was a hostile, Cody, and so I put my precious anatomy behind these bushes, and told the young lady to——"

"The young lady?"

Bolivar wiggled his fat hand amiably, and smiled with supreme self-assurance.

"I believe I said young lady, Cody?"

"You out here with a young lady, when hostiles are thick as mosquitoes in August, and——"

Bolivar looked about with a start, and then smiled.

"That's all right about the hostiles, Cody," he interrupted. "There ain't none, or I wouldn't be here. And, as far as the young lady's concerned, you're to blame fer that."

He stepped farther out, beyond the trail, and waved his fat hand, hallooing at the same time.

"She's hid over there with the horses. When we seen you comin', I didn't know who you might be, and so I told her to hike over there, while I laid here to interview

you, if you seemed friendly. And you're to blame fer her bein' here, Cody, and that's a fact."

Buffalo Bill was almost too much surprised for words.

Bolivar went on explaining:

"She come to the town, ye see, and begun askin' fer you. She's the daughter of the man you set out to investigate about, and when I heard that, you and me bein' sech friends, ye know, I went over to her room and interviewed her."

He smiled, and stroked his fat face with a pudgy hand.

"Well, when I heard about them diamonds, Cody, I knowed it was important, and so I told her I'd guide her out here, fer she was determined to see you at once, and I didn't know but mebbe if she and me found 'em together, she'd be generous about it; and I ruther thought that even you would treat me right, if I brought her to you."

The angry flush which had come to the face of Buffalo Bill did not disturb the man's monumental self-assurance.

"You mean Miss Benton?"

"That's the name, Cody. And there she comes now."

The woman had seen him wave his hand, and had heard his halloo, and now she came out of the near-by sand-hills, riding one horse and leading another.

"Bolivar, you're about as big an ass as I've met lately!" said the scout. "This is no place for a girl like Miss Benton, nor for you. I had a narrow escape last evening from Pawnees, and this morning I saw a band of Sioux. I suppose you're anxious to have your scalp lifted?"

Bolivar clapped his hand nervously to his head, and stared up at the scout, and then off over the plains.

"You don't mean it, Cody?" he asked.

"I certainly mean every word of it. Sioux and Pawnees are about, and if we don't have trouble before we get away from here I miss my guess."

"But there ain't none in sight, Cody, and, now that you're here to guide us, you see, why, we——"

He wiggled his hand again, and tried to smile.

Buffalo Bill sat on his horse in the trail until the woman arrived.

He had met her more than once before, and his presence here was because of a mission he had undertaken in her behalf.

She smiled when she recognized him.

Yet she glanced anxiously along the trail over which he had come, and said, as soon as she had greeted him:

"I suppose Mr. Ingalls is near?"

Deceit was foreign to the nature of Buffalo Bill. He looked away, not daring to meet her eye. Yet what was he to say?

Ingalls, the man she inquired about, was the scout's companion, who had been shot from his saddle by the Pawnees, and of whom later he had not been able to find a trace. Ingalls was, moreover, the man whom this woman had expected soon to marry.

Ingalls had brought her and the scout together, and when the scout had been won over to undertake the work she wished done, he had set forth with him.

"To tell the truth," said Buffalo Bill, stretching the truth to the breaking-point, "I haven't seen him this mornin'."

"Then you don't know where he is?" she cried, in alarm.

Her face had paled, and her eyes grew big and bright.

"Something has happened to him," she declared; "I can tell it from your manner!"

Bolivar's fat face had become suddenly of a pasty yellow.

He took the bridle-rein of his horse, and began to climb heavily into the saddle.

"Cody, I suppose he's just wandered off some'eres," he remarked, as he settled his stirrup-leathers, coming thus to the scout's aid. "I reckon we'll be finding him by and by, if we look a little."

"I've been searching for him," said the scout evasively.

"Mr. Cody," said the girl, "you must tell me the truth! Something has happened to Leonard!"

It was not easy to evade a direct answer. And if the truth was not told now, the result would be continual evasion, deceit, heart-questioning, and self-condemnation.

The scout resolved suddenly on the straight course, much as he regretted the necessity, which must bring sorrow to this young woman.

He looked into her pale and expressive face. Already he had admired her beauty, as one may admire the beauty of a flower. He knew that she was warm-hearted, intelligent, keen-witted, and this, her plunge into the plains with Bolivar, showed that she was courageous, though lacking in judgment and discretion. Impulsiveness was her chief fault.

So he said to her:

"Miss Benton, if you insist on knowing all that I know, which I could wish was more, I shall have to deal frankly with you. I do not know where Leonard Ingalls is, but I am very much afraid he has been killed by Pawnees."

Her face became as white as chalk, and she reeled in her saddle, catching her breath with a sudden gasp.

"Miss Benton," he went on, "I spared you this as long as I could, but you made me speak. I——"

He spurred quickly to her side, thinking she was about to faint.

But she summoned her energies, and did nothing of the kind.

For a moment she said not a word, but tears gushed to her eyes.

"Mr. Cody," she said, when she could command her words, "I thank you for telling me the exact truth. When did this happen?"

"If you can bear the details now?" he said, his tone protesting.

"Yes," she insisted; "I must know everything, at once!"

Thus commanded, he detailed to her his knowledge of the affair, smoothing over the gruesomeness as well as he could; and he worded the tale in a way to give her as much hope as possible, though he had very little himself.

She caught at this hope with trembling eagerness.

"I'm going to believe that he was not killed!" she declared, as her face brightened. "We can find him! We must find him!"

"Cody," said Bolivar, with beaming effusiveness, "see how luck hangs round me and my doin's, like burrs to the back of a woolly dog! Now, if I hadn't guided the young lady out here——"

"She would have been safe in the town! Very true; and it would have been better all round."

"But, Mr. Cody," said the girl tremulously, "it was I who wished to come, and now am glad that I did come. Mr. Bolivar is not to blame. He heard my story, and he said he could guide me. And he did. We found you, and I know now what has happened to Mr. Ingalls. We refuse to believe the worst. He is a prisoner of the Pawnees. We will rescue him—we must rescue him!"

She spoke with almost hysterical eagerness and haste.

The scout looked at her with feelings of sorrow, thinking that she did not know what she planned to do. And he felt that if a search for, and attempt to, rescue Leonard Ingalls was to be made, supposing him to be alive and in the hands of the Pawnee Indians, the attempt was almost foredoomed to failure through the handicap of the presence of these two people.

"Do you—would you—mind showing me where this—this dreadful thing happened?" she asked, when they had talked over the matter for some time.

"I can show you the place, Miss Benton. But I have been thinking that really the safest and best course would be for me to conduct you and Bolivar back to the town you came from, and there get some experienced border-men and go about this matter in a way to promise more than we can hope to accomplish."

"It would mean a delay of a week!"

"Almost that."

"And all that time Leonard would be the prisoner of these Indians! No, Mr. Cody! You think I am a weak girl, but I am strong enough for any undertaking now. And you will find that I do not complain at hardship, and will not flinch from danger. I am armed!"

She drew from a pocket of her dress a small revolver, of the type which Bolivar would have called a "pop-gun."

"I am armed," she said, "and so is Mr. Bolivar! We can do something, I am sure. And"—she grew almost hysterical again—"if we can't do anything, if Leonard is dead, I don't care then what becomes of me, or whether I live or die. I think I should die, if I returned now to the town."

"There are some other matters we might talk about," said the scout, both to draw her mind somewhat from this, and because it was well to tell her now of the discoveries which he and her lover had made.

"Mr. Ingalls and I came out here hoping to find traces of your father, you remember?" he reminded.

"Yes!" she said, regarding him earnestly. "You found something?"

"We discovered the skeleton of a horse, on the dry trail that leads across from the Sand Creek tributary of the Platte toward Lower Colbert Pass. The weathered remains of a saddle and other accouterments were scattered about with the bones of the horse, showing that Indians had not, at least, taken the saddle. We found no indications of a rider for that horse, but in the rotting saddle-pouch we did find a letter, or a note, which we believed was written by your father."

Her face had turned white again.

"You—you have it?" she gasped.

"No; Mr. Ingalls took possession of it, and he has it now. But I can tell you what it contained. And from that writing, we know that your father was surrounded by Indians at the time, and that he felt himself to be in an almost hopeless position."

Then he told her what was in the tattered and weather-worn letter.

"I fear all this is too much for you!" he declared, seeing her reel on the back of her horse.

"No—no!" she protested. "Do not mind me, Mr. Cody!"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and bent over on the saddle, sobs choking her.

"Cody," said Bolivar, his face still more yellowish and pasty, "I'm agreein' with what you said awhile ago, that

it would be healthier fer us to back-track toward the town. I ain't got but one scalp, and I don't keer about losin' it. I'm proud of me looks, ye know, and there ain't any kind of hair-oil that I know of will grow hair on a head that's been treated by a scalpin'-knife."

He tried to smile, and to maintain something of his customary lightness of manner, but rather failed in the attempt.

CHAPTER IV.

BOLIVAR'S MOTIVE.

Miss Nellie Benton stuck to her determination to make a search for her missing lover, Leonard Ingalls.

She declared hysterically that she would not return to the town unless they tied her to her horse and returned her by force, and that if they would not assist her in making that search for Ingalls, she would try it alone.

Buffalo Bill then had an "aside" with Bolivar the boastful, and expressed himself strongly to the greasy loafer and gambler.

"Bolivar," he said, "don't you think it was scoundrelly of you to bring that girl out here? Why did you do it?"

Bolivar had the hide of an elephant, so that words of reproof fell on him without effect.

He smiled oilily.

"Cody, I've been wantin' to explain that to ye fully. You'll say all sorts o' things when ye hear it, but you'll agree with me, jes' the same, though ye may not admit it. I don't boast o' bein' better'n other people. The girl told me her story. She said that her father had set out from California to cross the continent by way of the plains, and that he was bringin' with him a fortune in diamonds, which he'd picked up in Asia and Africa, where fer some years he'd been wanderin'. She said that when he reached the plains he dropped out of sight. He had writ a letter, which he sent on by another way, tellin' jes' how he meant to cross the plains, and the route he was to take, when he was to start, and when arrive, and all that; and the letter came through. But he didn't. He was never heard of ag'in.

"That was nighabout a year ago. By an' by this plucky girl sets out with her lover to look into the thing. Both of 'em don't know much about the West, and less about the plains and Injuns. Ingalls, the young feller, gits you to go with him and make a search fer Benton, the girl's father.

"You're gone so long that she gits uneasy, and she comes to the town there where you'd started frum, and where at the present I'm stayin'. She puts up at the hotel where I'm drinkin' my good red liquor and playin' cards with the boys, and I hears about her. Knowing what was in the wind, and all about them diamonds, fer sech things can't be kept on the quiet, Cody, I went to

see her. I'd been told by a man I believed in that all this talk of there bein' Injun peril out here right now was bosh, fer the Injuns was that quiet, he said, they'd feed out of yer hand like lap-dogs; and so I told her, and offered to come with her and guide her, and all that."

He smiled in a manner meant to be ingratiating, but which was simply irritating to the scout in his present frame of mind.

"Go on!" Buffalo Bill commanded.

"Well, we come; and you'll acknowledge that we found you!"

"By an accident."

"I don't call it that, Cody. It was simply gambler's luck, the kind I have sometimes when the cards run my way. I made a bet with myself that I'd find you, and I won."

"Did you really want to find me?"

The greasy face flushed.

"Well, Cody, to be honest," and he laughed uneasily, "I'll admit that I wasn't keerin' if I did er not, if I succeeded in hittin' that diamond-mine! That was what I was anxious about."

The scout's face hardened, and his voice grew sharp.

"Honest, now, Bolivar, wasn't it your hope to find those diamonds, or a clue to where they were, and then light out of the country with them? You would have abandoned the girl, and let her find her way back to the town alone, if you'd done that?"

Boastful Bolivar's face paled again, and his eyes glittered with a touch of anger.

"Cody, that's a hard sayin'."

"Unless you meant something of that kind, I don't see why you ventured out here with her. And I don't understand how you expected to make any discoveries!"

"I was gamblin', Cody! Can't ye understand that? I couldn't lose anything, unless it was my scalp, and from what I've heard I didn't believe that was in danger. I couldn't lose nothin', I thought, and I stood to win a good deal."

"And you would have robbed the girl?"

"You're rough, Cody! No, I didn't mean to do anything of the kind; but I did calc'late that if I won out in this gamblin' deal, she, bein' the lady she is, would have hung some o' them diamonds round my alabaster neck. Fer, you see, she was huntin' fer her father, with the diamonds a secondary consideration, while, to tell ye the truth, I was thinkin' of the diamonds fu'st, last, and all the time, and not carin' a hoot in Halifax fer the old man. Of course, if he was livin', I——"

"Bolivar, I'm afraid you don't know what it is to be honest. But you will have to play honest, so long as you stay with me."

Bolivar's easy manner began to return. He had got through this ordeal without scorching his fingers.

"What do you intend to do, Cody?" he asked, ignoring the scout's unpleasant opinion of him.

"I think we'll look for Ingalls."

"With any hope of findin' him?"

"I don't know."

Bolivar was silent for a minute.

"Cody," he said, presently, "I reckon you didn't find any diamonds where you found that letter you told her about?"

"You heard what I said to her!"

"Yes, but ye might have kep' that back, ye know. There was some diamonds there, Cody?"

His oily face flushed, and his eyes glittered greedily.

"There were no diamonds there!"

Bolivar hesitated a moment.

"Then, Cody, I don't see that really there's any use of goin' farther. I vote with you, that we hike fer the town."

"There's the plain trail before you, Bolivar."

"You ain't goin', yourself?"

"No."

"You're goin' to search ag'in fer the diamonds?"

"I'm going to see if I can discover what has happened to Ingalls. There will be a good deal of danger and——"

"Ye ain't goin' to hunt no more for the girl's father?"

"We may."

Bolivar took off his greasy hat, and doubled it nervously, as he wiped his perspiring forehead.

"Cody," he said, "I'm puzzled to know what to do. I think, though, that I'd like to take a look at the place where you found the bones of the old man's horse and that letter. Yes, I think I would. Mebbe you didn't look close enough. And she really does want to find them diamonds, you see, and——"

The scout turned to ride back to where the girl was awaiting them.

Bolivar hesitated but a moment, and then followed the scout.

"Miss Benton," he called out, before Buffalo Bill had spoken, "me and Cody has determined to stand by ye in this thing, and make a search as complete as ye kin wish. I said I would when I set out with you, ye remember, and I'm a man that stands by his word."

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERED BY THE PAWNEES.

Two days were spent in journeying to the point where Ingalls had fallen from his horse, and to the point where Buffalo Bill and Ingalls had found the tattered note written by Tom Benton, the father of the girl.

They were days of wearing anxiety for her, with nights of sleeplessness and tears.

The scout exerted himself to the utmost to pick up

the trail of Leonard Ingalls. He had made the effort before, and his success was no better now.

Included with this searching was the constant need of watching against a surprise by Indians.

The girl clung to the belief that Ingalls had been carried a prisoner by the Pawnees. She argued that if he had been killed his body would have been found, for it was not the custom of the Pawnees to carry away the bodies of their foes.

It was certain, however, that, if so carried away a prisoner, he was wounded, and that the Pawnees should carry away a wounded prisoner was a thing so contrary to the experience of the scout that it seemed to him almost improbable.

The trail of the Pawnee ponies had been destroyed by the fire that had burned over a large area of grass.

That it could be picked up beyond this burned area seemed likely, if time enough were given to it.

But as the Pawnees were no doubt a hunting-party, wandering about in search of game, the task of following them would not be easy.

And the chances of rescuing any prisoner they held would certainly be an undertaking so difficult that it ought not to be contemplated, with the girl.

Bearing this in mind, Buffalo Bill was almost ready to declare that Miss Benton must return with him to the town, and remain there, while, with a number of bordermen, he tried to follow up the Pawnees.

He had made a last unsuccessful search in the neighborhood of the spot where he had been ambuscaded with Ingalls, and was thinking of turning away, when Bolivar came riding toward him, swinging his hat in much excitement.

Bolivar and the girl had been down by the sandy riverbed, while the scout was plodding round through the sand-hills; and there, looking through the screen of cottonwoods, the good-natured loafer had descried a body of mounted Indians on the other side of the stream.

His fright, as seen by Buffalo Bill, partook of the comical.

He fairly shook in his saddle like a bag of jelly as he reined in by the scout.

"Pawnees, by all the gods o' war!" he exclaimed. "Cody, I seen them—a hundred if there's one; and they're coming this way. We've got to hide er hike, and do it this minute. I left Miss Benton and rode lickity-split to tell you. We've got to move!"

Buffalo Bill slipped from his saddle to the ground.

"Hold my pony a minute, Bolivar," he said, throwing the rein to him.

The Pawnee pony had become as docile as any rider could wish by this time, and the "creased" wound on its forehead seemed not to trouble it.

"Hurry!" said Bolivar, as he caught the rein. "There ain't no use doin' much lookin'. I seen 'em plain enough,

"They're comin' toward the river, and I reckon they mean to cross. If we stay here we'll be seen."

"And it looks as if we might be seen while riding away!"

The scout scrambled to the top of the highest sand-hill near at hand, and there had a view of the Indians beyond the river.

They were Pawnees, not in such numbers as Bolivar had said, but a strong enough party to be very dangerous customers, and the scout was half convinced they were the same Pawnees who had ambushed him and Ingalls almost at this very spot.

Having determined this, he came sliding down to where the fat rider awaited him.

"It's as I said, Cody? And now we've got to git!"

"We can't get away by fast riding," said the scout.

"No? Then we're goners!"

His greasy face paled.

"Cody, if we make a hot run fer it we might hold 'em till dark, and then we'd have a chance."

"A better chance is to hide here until dark. Night is a long way off."

"Hide right here?"

"No; in those willows beyond the little river."

Bolivar waved frantically to the girl, and she came galloping toward them.

It was of all things what she ought not to have done.

The Indians were much nearer the river than when Bolivar had ridden away from it, and now they heard the clatter of the hoofs of her horse.

A single yell barked out like the yelp of a coyote.

Buffalo Bill paled slightly, though his fear was not for himself so much as for others. Bolivar shook in terror.

"They're comin', Cody?"

"Yes; they heard Miss Benton's horse, and they're riding now for the river. There's a crossing up beyond, and they'll be on this side in a little while."

"We'd better run for it, Cody!"

The scout seemed to hesitate.

The untiring speed of Indian ponies, and the dogged determination of Indian riders, were things to be counted, in a race of that kind.

Buffalo Bill had an Indian pony, which was probably in as good condition as any of those ridden by the Pawnees.

But Bolivar and the girl, in venturing forth into these dangerous plains, had not chosen their horses with care. They were heavy horses, somewhat of the cart-horse variety, and in a test with Pawnee ponies ridden by merciless Pawnee riders they would have small show of success.

"It seems to me I'd ruther be runnin' than hidin', Cody. They're sure to find us!" Bolivar urged.

He looked toward the river in terror, expecting to see the Pawnees break into view there.

"The trouble is," said the scout, "that we're likely to be overtaken out on the open plains. The chances are that way. And we'd have there nothing to put up a fight behind, except possibly the bodies of our horses. The Pawnees would then be sure to wipe us out."

The girl had reached the side of the two men.

Fright shone in her eyes.

"Pawnees!" she gasped.

"Yes," said the scout calmly.

"We may be able to get beyond the hills before we're seen," she urged.

"Your horse was heard, Miss Benton," was the answer.

"But, even if it had not been, we couldn't have escaped discovery. Our tracks are all round here, where we've been searching, and the Pawnees would be certain to see them."

"There goes another yell, Cody!" exclaimed Bolivar, in fear and excitement. "They're at the river!"

"Follow me," said the scout. "We'll have to make a stand in the rocks and cottonwoods not far from that spring. It's the best place in the neighborhood for that purpose; the only place where we'll have a chance. Miss Benton, don't get frightened!"

But the girl was frightened terribly.

She realized suddenly what she had done in insisting on remaining in this dangerous locality.

They rode down from the sandy crest, into the half-dry bed of the tributary of the Platte, and then galloped toward the spring.

When near it, they turned aside, and took shelter behind some high rocks on the lower slope of the hill.

Back of these rocks the horses were secure so long as the weapons of the scout and his companions could hold the Pawnees at bay.

The Pawnees had not seen this movement, so rapidly was it executed, but they crossed the Platte, fording it a half-mile below, and then advanced up the stream.

"They're comin', Cody!" said Bolivar, shaking with excitement. "They hain't seen us yit, but they'll be certain to pick up that trail."

He and the scout were looking out from behind a group of small boulders.

These boulders and the larger rocks formed an excellent wall-like barricade, behind which a stiff fight could be made.

"Brace up!" said the scout. "Don't let Miss Benton see that you're frightened."

Bolivar smiled in a sickly way.

"Cody," he said, "fighting with Indians ain't my long suit. If I'd dreamed there was danger out here, I'd hung close to the barrooms back in the town. They tell me that whisky and cards are dangerous, but I prefer 'em to redskins."

He was making an admirable effort to summon his old cheerfulness.

"And, Cody, speakin' of barrooms calls my attention ag'in to the mournful fact that I ain't had a drink sense yisterday mornin', when I drained the last of the liquor I brought with me. If I had jes' a taste, I reckon I could fight better."

He glanced longingly at the flat metal flask which bulged the scout's hip pocket.

"I reckon, Cody, you wouldn't want to part with jes' a few swallows of the snake-bite antidote you kerry about with ye?" he asked.

"We'll fight better without it."

"Not me, Cody; you don't know me. I'm as bold as a lion when I've got a few stiff drinks in me, but no good fer anything when I ain't."

The scout did not respond to this solicitation.

"Well, have ye got somethin' to eat with ye? I've got to be doin' somethin'—eatin' er drinkin'—er I—Great Joshua!"

He sank back to the sand with a quiver, as a blood-curdling Pawnee yell broke on the air.

The trail of the horses had been found.

"Cody, we're dead men!"

"Bolivar, I'm ashamed of you! What effect will your cowardice have on Miss Benton?" the scout remarked, in a low tone.

"I'm ashamed of myself, Cody—ashamed of the fact that I ever let anything draw me away from close contact with good whisky. But I was flat broke; couldn't even raise money enough to git a drink. The bar-keeper got haughty, when he knew it, and refused to trust me any more. Then I tumbled to this diamond hunt that was bein' kerried on; and, believin' there was no danger at all out here, I thought mebbe luck would throw a diamond necklace round my alabaster neck, if I—Great snakes, Cody, there they let loose ag'in!"

The yelling of the Pawnees rose once more, and they broke into sight in the valley of the little stream.

There was upward of a score of them, painted and feathered in a manner to thoroughly frighten such a man as Bolivar.

He could hardly repress a shriek of fear when he beheld them.

"Cody, we're goners!" he cried, and he seemed about to try to burrow from sight in the sand behind the rocks.

Miss Benton, who had been farther back, came gliding forward, holding her little revolver.

"Mr. Cody," she said, her voice trembling, "I must take my part here. I'm to blame for this situation, and I insist on standing with you two brave men in this fight."

Bolivar's eyes rolled. He sat up with a jerk.

"Miss Benton," he gasped, "we'll defend ye long's we've got breath in our bodies. We may never find them diamonds now, but, jes' the same, we'll stand by ye as ef you was payin' us well fer it."

Then he fell back again, as the Pawnees, with a renewal of those chilling yells, came riding straight toward the rocks.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS ARROWS.

A minute or so later Buffalo Bill observed a peculiar thing.

The Pawnees were apparently afraid of the spring, which bubbled up not far from the rocks where he and his companions had sought refuge.

When they drew near to it, they swerved their ponies and rode by, swinging out round it in a wide half-circle.

As they thus swung by, they discharged a shower of arrows at the rocks, these being beyond the spring, on the lower slope of the rocky hill.

"See that!" said the scout.

"Yes, I seen 'em—seen a million of arrers!" gurgled Bolivar, misunderstanding the scout's words. "Two of 'em came through 'tween the rocks, scrapin' me. But I reckon the way the redskins shy off they're afraid of our revolvers."

"They seem to be afraid of that spring!"

"Afraid of that—What, the spring?"

"They seem to be."

Both Bolivar and Miss Benton looked at the spring.

It was in plain view, and at the moment was rising for its periodic overflow.

They saw the waters swell, and then the rising of the big bubbles that broke on the surface, and the upward lift of the gaseous vapor.

The smoke, or whatever it was, rose in a denser cloud than the scout had before observed, having a considerable body, and not being dissipated until it was some distance in the air.

The watching Pawnees drew frantically on their raw-hide bridles, and crouched as if in fear, when they beheld that cloud of smoke. Then they wheeled their ponies round and rode off some distance, where they sat in a huddled group, regarding the spring and the rocks which sheltered the scout and his companions.

"Wow! Cody, they *air* afraid o' that spring!"

"Why is it?" asked Miss Benton.

"Some superstition connected with it, perhaps. That smoke hints of mystery, and whatever is mysterious and puzzling always frightens the ignorant. Likely they think the spring is haunted."

"Then, by the snakes of Ireland, I'll hug close to this spring until them redskins wear their patience out and go away!" said Bolivar. "Luck's with us in this game, Cody, I do believe, and a minute ago I thought the cards was shore stacked ag'inst us. You can't never tell how a game's goin' until it's played out."

All watched the Indians anxiously.

The smoke had vanished, and the spring had subsided, and now merely flowed on in its ordinary placid manner.

Then they beheld a Pawnee, who was evidently a chief, haranguing the others. He shook his bow in the direction of the rocks, and, squirming round in his saddle, went through some expressive pantomime.

"What's the villain meanin' by that?" asked Bolivar.

"I can't hear his words. But I judge he's urging the Pawnees to make the attack, and disregard the spring."

Bolivar's face paled again, and its hopeful look was replaced by anxiety.

Soon the Pawnees began to spread out in a semicircle, and rode toward the spring.

They came forward for a time bravely enough, but again, as they neared the spring, they wavered, veered their ponies, and rode by at a distance, contenting themselves with shooting a number of arrows at the heaps of rocks.

Bolivar's courage returned.

"Cody, they're more afraid of us than the spring!" he boasted. "They know we're armed, and like brave men will fight to the last gasp. It's a good thing for that chief they didn't come any nearer. I had my revolver on him, and was jes' about to pull the trigger when he shied and went by on t'other side, like the Levite in the parable. Cody, we're all right!"

His voice bubbled with joy.

Again the Pawnees grouped together and talked, and their chief repeated his pantomime.

"Desprit men layin' at bay and pertectin' an innocent female ain't to be tackled without due consideration, Cody, and they know it! It would mean some dead redskins strung round out there on that plain. They ain't no more ready to die than some other fellers I could mention."

But the Pawnee chief seemed again fusing courage into his braves.

Once more they formed in that wide semicircle, and came on.

This time they broke into a wild chorus of yells as they rode at the rocks. Some of them were firing bows, and others rifles. Their yells were demoniac.

"They're comin'!" Bolivar screeched, in a renewed panic of fear.

He pitched up his revolver nervously, shut his eyes as he pulled the trigger, and fired it into the air, high over the heads of the Pawnees.

The spring was bubbling again to its overflow.

The overflow came, and the smoke-cloud lifted.

Buffalo Bill, sighting from behind the rocks, had pointed his rifle at the plumed chief.

The chief fell, with a wild death-yell; yet the scout had not pulled the trigger.

The Pawnees stopped, jerking wildly at the reins of their ponies, as the chief pitched over, his arms hanging down.

Between his shoulders was fixed an arrow that had spitted him through and through, pinning him to the raw-hide saddle, the feathered shaft sticking upright.

Where had that arrow been shot from, and by whom?

The howling Pawnees closed in a panicky group round their chief, and then all raced away, breaking for the higher ground in scared flight.

There they stopped, and the scout saw them lifting the chief to the ground.

"Wow! Did ye see that, Cody!" squalled Bolivar, in wild excitement. "How's that fer shootin'? Didn't ye see me pot him?"

"I didn't."

"But you didn't shoot, Cody! I was the only one that shot."

"You shot an arrow from your pistol, I suppose?" said the scout scornfully.

"An arrer? No, I shot a bullet!"

"And the chief was killed by an arrow."

Bolivar stared with wide-open eyes.

"Do you mean that, Cody?"

"I certainly do. I think Miss Benton saw it."

She nodded. Her eyes were shining in a strange way.

"And the arrow came from above," the scout went on. "Some one must have shot it from the top of the hill."

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully, "if a rock up there couldn't have glanced the arrow back in such a way that it struck the chief?"

"It's a better explanation than I could have thought up myself," said Buffalo Bill. "It must be the real one, too. For, as we saw when we were searching round here, no one is on top of this hill."

He looked out at the excited Pawnees.

Then he smiled grimly.

"You saw the smoke lift from the spring as the arrow struck him. It would be just like Indians to believe that arrow was shot out of the spring into the air, and fell on the chief, slaying him for daring to approach it."

"Cody, I'm hopin' it!" Bolivar gurgled.

His face was a greasy white, and his eyes were bulging.

"But it kinder makes me feel queer in the j'int's myself. If arrers go to droppin' out of the air, they might take a notion to plug us as well as the Pawnees, Cody."

He twisted his head round and stared up at the rocky hill that rose behind them.

Contrary to the expectation of Buffalo Bill, the death of the chief filled the warriors with a strange rage.

"They must have argued themselves out of the belief that the killing of the chief was mysterious, or connected with the smoke of the spring," he said, as he saw the braves gathering together for another advance. "And if that is so, then the worst is right before us."

"Cody, I was a fool fer ever venturing out into this place! Miss Benton, I——"

The yells of the charging Pawnees broke Bolivar's wailing sentence.

They came on, more furious than ever in their wild charge, yelling more like fiends than before.

As if they feared to trust their nerves, they began to lash their ponies as they approached the spring.

At their head rode a plumed brave of gigantic stature, who held a long lance that was fluttering with feathers and silver ornaments.

His feathered war-bonnet streamed out behind him like the tail of a comet, as he thus rode to the charge.

The eyes of the scout and those with him were fixed on this terrible figure, and on the warriors who rode at his heels, and the scout had his rifle ready, intending to bring down this brave, if he could, and so check that wild advance.

Then, unseen until that moment, a gigantic dog leaped apparently out of the smoke that hung over the spring, or else from behind the rocks near the spring. With quick bounds, he reached the horse of the plumed warrior, and sprang at its throat, pulling it down.

With a yell of rage, the brave who rode at the side of the big warrior poised his lance for a thrust at the dog, when an arrow struck him between the shoulders, as it had struck the chief, and he dropped over on the back of his pony.

The advance of the Pawnees was no sooner checked in this strange way, when other wild Indian yells broke on the air—yells keyed to a different pitch, and which, while as terrible, were wholly different from the yells of the Pawnees.

"Sioux!" cried Buffalo Bill.

He sprang up, recklessly exposing himself, that he might see over the rocks.

Then he beheld a band of Sioux charging the Pawnees. They had ridden straight from the river at a wild gallop, unseen until then by the Pawnees, because of the excitement of that charge upon the rocks behind the spring.

The scout dropped down behind the rocks, crouching; and he pulled down Bolivar, who had also risen.

"Sioux!" the scout repeated.

"More Indians?"

"Yes; they're attacking the Pawnees."

The answering yells of the Pawnees rose in a series of wild and defiant whoops. The Sioux were their hereditary enemies, and they were not loath to meet them in deadly combat.

CHAPTER VII.

INVESTIGATING THE MYSTERY.

The battle between the Pawnees and the Sioux rolled off across the sand-hills.

Bolivar swung his hat, and would have risen up, yelling

in his delight to see them go, but Buffalo Bill's hand restrained him.

"Caution!" said the scout.

"But, Cody, they've gone!"

"Yes, I know; but we want to lie low."

"Now's the time to git out o' this, Cody. We want to hit that trail and fly fer home, sweet home, where the beer-bottles air poppin' an' the mint juleps air julepin', and the——"

He swung his hat again in an ecstasy.

"Cody, if I ever plant these number ten shoes on them blessed streets ag'in, there I stay forevermore, you bet! Don't it make you have a longin', to think of the boyees waitin' round the card-tables, and the barkeep shakin' the drinks, and the billiard-balls clickin', and the wheel o' fortune goin' round and round? It fair bu'sts my heart to think of it."

In his delight he had forgotten the presence of the girl and the stories he had told her of his courage and disinterestedness.

But she was not thinking of him.

"It was singular about that dog," remarked the scout. "Where did it come from?"

"Maybe it was a wolf, instead of a dog, Cody. It scooted, soon's it pulled that horse down. Anyhow, I didn't see it no more. Maybe I was too excited to see it. But the horse hopped up and lit out, with t'other Pawnee ponies."

"And the Indians carried that warrior off with them," the girl added.

Buffalo Bill again looked over the rocks.

The Indians were now out of sight.

"I think we ought to investigate that matter a little."

"And run the risk of havin' the Pawnees on our backs, by waitin' round here!" Bolivar protested. "I say, now is the time to slide fer home. Miss Benton agrees with me."

She hesitated.

"I wish it did not seem necessary to go home, or back to that town; but I'm willing to do whatever Mr. Cody advises."

Both understood what she meant. They had not found any traces of the missing young man, and what they had discovered concerning the writer of that yellowed note, her father, had not been of appreciable amount. She was loath to return with these things undetermined. Yet, feeling that already she had led these men into deadly peril by her selfish desires, she was ready now to follow the advice of the scout.

Buffalo Bill left the rock fortress when he knew that the battling Indians had disappeared, and climbed to the top of the hill near-by.

The way was rough and rocky, and in places very steep.

He kept in mind the apparent fact that the arrows which

had slain the chief and the giant warrior had come from above, thus suggesting that they had been fired from the top of this hill.

The girl had suggested that perhaps Pawnee arrows had glanced back from the rocks.

While that might have happened in one instance, it seemed unlikely that it could have happened twice in the same way. That was against the law of probabilities, as he viewed it.

The scout kept his hand on his revolver, and looked about warily.

But he saw nothing to indicate that any one had been on top of the hill. The summit was piled with great stones, and there was a thick growth of bushes of various kinds, with thorny plants and much cactus. In places the ground was wet, and suggested hidden springs; and that recalled to his mind the singular spring in the bed of the stream, of which the Pawnees had so evidently been afraid.

From the top of the hill the scout could see the continuance of the battle between the Sioux and the Pawnees.

Putting his field-glasses to his eyes, he watched the battle.

The Sioux were getting the worst of it, apparently. Half their number were down, and Indian ponies were galloping about riderless over the plains. Now and then the wild and distant yells of the battling savages reached him.

"A good thing for us that the Sioux put in an appearance just then. Bolivar thought perhaps the arrows which killed those two Pawnees were fired by some Sioux who had climbed up here, and while it's possible, I find nothing to show that his view is correct."

With the aid of the glasses, he searched the ground closely about the base of the hill and along the half-dry bed of the little river, but nothing was gained by it.

When he descended from the hill, Bolivar was in a fever of impatience to be going.

"I think it best to wait until dark," said Buffalo Bill, in reply to the fat man's importunities. "The Sioux and Pawnees, as you see, have gone almost in the direction we shall have to travel over. Straggling parties of them might come upon us and make trouble. If we wait until after dark, we can probably get through without being seen."

"But they may come back here, Cody!"

"They may, but not soon. I'd like to take a look about that spring, I think, and see if we can discover anything there."

"Concernin' that dog?" asked Bolivar. "In my opinion, it was a wolf."

"Dog or wolf, I'd like to look at its tracks. And I'm puzzled, I confess, about those arrows."

"There's nothin' puzzlin' about any of that, Cody," said Bolivar, with an air of superior wisdom. "That dog

was a wolf, and some Sioux climbed onto the hill and shot them arrows."

"Would you like to go down to the spring?"

"I dunno," said Bolivar doubtfully.

"And then we'll get our horses and start, just a little before sunset," continued the scout.

Bolivar came climbing over the rocks.

He feared to remain alone there with the girl, yet disliked to confess it, for he desired to pose as a brave man.

"I reckon, Cody, I kin go wherever you do!" he boasted.

"If you'll remain here, near the horses, a little while, Miss Benton," urged the scout, "we'll take a look down there for the tracks of that mysterious dog, and then will come right back."

She was really much braver than Bolivar, and answered the scout with a smile.

Yet the smile was troubled, and her face was pale.

She was thinking of Leonard Ingalls, and of her father, and wondering concerning their fate.

She was asking herself the singular question, if either of them could have fired those arrows.

It seemed so foolish a question that she would not voice it.

The scout and Bolivar disappeared from her view soon after climbing over the rocks. Then the bravery that had upheld her in their presence gave way, and she cried pitifully.

"Oh, Leonard! Leonard!" she moaned.

Bolivar was talking loudly to the scout, trying to dispel his fears by the loudness and bravery of his words.

"Cody, if that Sioux hadn't downed them two Pawnees, it would have fell to me to do it, fer I was pullin' on 'em jes' at that time. I reckon the Sioux skedaddled, when the fight begun, and j'ined his side in the fight. Sing'lar, though, that a wolf should be bold enough to jump out and tackle a horse in that way."

"It was the most remarkable thing I ever heard of, if that was a wolf."

"You don't believe it was a wolf?"

"We'll know soon."

They descended into the dry bed of the stream, and then leaped across the little watercourse made by the overflow of the spring.

The spring was rising again for its periodic overflow.

Together the scout and Bolivar stood and watched it, as it rose to its highest, with bursting bubbles, and that rising of gaseous vapor.

"It's so durn queer, Cody, that it makes me feel as the Pawnees do about it. I reckon that dog, er wolf, couldn't jumped out o' that smoke? That's a foolish question. He jes' couldn't done that, ye know!"

Buffalo Bill walked on, and came to the spot where the animal had leaped at the throat of the horse and pulled it down.

There his big tracks were found, and a red stain on

the sand, showing that blood had flowed from the neck of the horse.

The scout scanned those tracks closely.

Bolivar also looked at them.

They saw where they had advanced from a point near the spring, and where they had returned, with long leaps, almost to the same point.

Slowly Buffalo Bill followed the tracks back to the spring, and to the rocks there, which were slippery with the overflow.

From that point they could not be farther seen.

"I reckon that wolf hopped back into the spring," said Bolivar jocosely.

"It was a dog."

"How d'ye know it?"

"By the appearance of the tracks."

"Ain't they the same?"

"I've seen too many wolf tracks to mistake them for a dog's. I admit they're much alike, but not just alike."

"And he hopped into the spring?" said Bolivar, trying to grin and make merry over the mystery.

"He leaped to those rocks, I suppose, and went round that side of the hill. The ground is all covered with rocks there, and that would prevent him from making tracks."

"A cute dog, if he did, Cody! He must have the brain of a human, if he figgered that out, an' kept on the rocks to keep his tracks from bein' follered. I'm still thinkin' you're mistaken, and that the critter was a wolf. No offense, Cody."

Buffalo Bill began to inspect the rocks, to determine, if possible, if the dog had passed over them, but the result was unsatisfactory.

By and by he gave it up, and returned to the spring, Bolivar following him closely wherever he went.

"You'll agree by and by that I'm right, Cody, that a wolf made them tracks, and that a Sioux shot them arrers down from the top of the hill. The thing ain't a mite mysterious to me."

He was becoming boastful again in tone and manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISAPPEARANCE OF MISS BENTON.

"Bolivar," said the scout, as they discussed the matter, "a dog is usually seen in company with his master. Now and then a dog will stray off and become lost, but it isn't likely that any dog would stray this far."

"Unless he was a wild dog!"

"A dog might revert to a state of wildness, and join a wolf-pack. I've heard of the like. This dog may have joined a wolf-pack, though we've seen no wolf tracks about here."

"But there couldn't be any man round here, without us knowin' it," argued Bolivar.

"Some one shot those arrows, Bolivar."

"And it might have been the master of the dog, you're thinkin'?"

"It might have been."

Bolivar was skeptical, and the scout confessed he was himself very uncertain.

As they talked, returning along by the spring, a scream came from the hillside. It was like a wild shriek of fright or terror, and arose from the point where Miss Benton had been left.

Buffalo Bill drew his revolver, and ran in that direction.

Bolivar, after an instant of hesitation, bounded after him, feeling that safety for him lay in keeping close to the scout.

Though Buffalo Bill ran rapidly, the way was up-hill, and some minutes passed before he could reach the place where Miss Benton had last been seen.

She was not there!

The scout stared round.

"Gone!" gasped Bolivar, his eyes rolling.

"Miss Benton!" the scout called.

The horses in behind the rocks a little farther on were stamping the ground and champing their bits.

The scout leaped toward them.

But Miss Benton was not there.

He hurried on, his eyes scanning the hillside.

"Miss Benton!" he called again, in louder tones.

No reply came.

Bolivar's red face had turned fairly blue, and his teeth chattered.

"Somethin's wrong here, Cody!"

"Very wrong!"

Again he shouted the girl's name.

"Go in that direction, Bolivar, and see what you can discover."

He pointed.

Bolivar hesitated.

"But, if there's some one over there, and——"

"If there is, we want to know it. I'll go this way. Look close."

He moved off, and saw Bolivar walk slowly in the direction indicated.

But Bolivar stopped soon, and came back, retreating in fright.

"Did you see anything?" Buffalo Bill asked sharply.

"Well, you know, Cody," Bolivar chattered, "ever sense that ambush you and Ingalls fell into, you've been preachin' caution. The shadders air ruther black on that side o' the hill, and——"

"You're afraid to go on?"

"No, I ain't reely afraid, Cody, but we've got to be cautious. We'd better keep together, I think. If some-thin' should happen to one of us, it'd be bad fer t'other one. There's a black myst'ry here, which we'll look into together. I think——"

Buffalo Bill saw it was useless to expect help from Bolivar.

"Come along, then," he said, "and see if you can keep a still tongue in your head."

Bolivar crept after him, as subdued as a whipped hound.

"Cody," he whispered, when they had gone some yards, "what's the use o' runnin' needless resk? If the feller that shot them arrers is layin' some'ere, he may drive one o' the things through us, and then——"

"Keep a still tongue in your head!" the scout interrupted.

"But, Cody, I reely can't go on! I'm fat, ye know, and this hill-climbin' winds me! I'm subject to heart-disease, and——"

"Stay behind, then," said the scout impatiently. "I'm going to see what's up here."

Bolivar followed, panting and perspiring, and shaking with terror.

Buffalo Bill made a careful search along that side of the hill.

Then he retraced his way, and as carefully searched on the side where the shadows had scared Bolivar.

When there were no results, he returned to the starting-point.

"What d'ye make of it?" Bolivar whispered, staring round with wide, rolling eyes.

"Nothing yet."

He began a closer inspection of the ground behind the rocks where he and the girl and Bolivar had been when the fight between the Sioux and the Pawnees commenced.

Finally he knelt down, closely looking at something he had found.

"What is it?" Bolivar panted.

"It isn't plain, but it seems to be a dog's track."

"A dog's track!"

The scout searched farther, looking for human footprints.

But the ground was not only rocky, it was covered with scattered boulders.

"There may have been a man with that dog, and if he ran over the rocks his footprints would be invisible."

"Ye mean he wouldn't made none?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. I find none."

Bolivar's mouth gaped open.

"Cody," he whispered, "could the brute have run off with the young lady?"

The scout continued searching.

"It's ridiculous to think it, I know, but what else kin we think? We left her here, and we find her gone, and the only thing we discover is one lonesome dog track. No man was here. So, unless the dog skeered her away, it carried her away. Ain't that logic, Cody?"

"I'm going to make another search."

"The horses have quieted down, Cody!"

"Yes."

"Whatever the thing was, it skeered the horses, or else her yellin' skeered 'em. I'm free to say sich shrieks would have skeered me."

He mopped his face with his dirty handkerchief.

Buffalo Bill set forth again, and Bolivar followed him as before, keeping close behind him.

The scout mounted now to the top of the hill.

As has been already said, the sides and top of the hill were bush-grown, and in addition there was much cactus, all of which made a search of this kind peculiarly difficult. There were innumerable dark holes between the big boulders, and openings between the bushes apparently made by the passage of animals.

By the time the scout and Bolivar reached the summit of the hill, the sun had set, and along the lower slopes and in the river valleys the shadows of night were already descending. The top of the hill was, however, still brightly lighted.

The scout once more searched with his field-glasses the surrounding country and the base of the hill.

The search, as before, yielded nothing.

Both Pawnees and Sioux had disappeared, and on all the wide expanse of the plains not a thing moved.

The persistent wind had dropped at sunset, and the silence on top of the lonely hill as night thus gathered was peculiarly impressive, and even depressing.

Bolivar dropped, panting, to a seat on a rock, as Buffalo Bill made his examination. And he looked longingly at the red sunset.

"Cody," he complained mournfully, "of all the durn fools, I take the belt! Off there is the town I left in a spirit of hilarity and hope, and there the boyees air now gatherin' before the bar of the Superba saloon, washin' the dust frum their throats and puttin' the red fire of courage and good cheer into their stummicks. In a little while the roulette-wheel will be playin' its merry tune, and the poker-chips will be stacked on the tables. A band will maybe play music in the square, and the people will be out in the streets enjoyin' themselves. And here I am! On top of this hill, that looks as if it was the last hill in the universe, miles frum nowhere, and night comin' on. I hain't had a drink fer so long that I've forgot how liquor tastes, and I'm that hungry that I could eat the soles of my shoes."

He mopped his face again.

"And, Cody, to make wuss wußt, a critter of some kind, in the shape of a dog er a wolf, has run off with the only female we had to lighten up our society, and maybe the blame thing is layin' roun' eyin' us at this minute, waitin' to git us sep'rated so it kin do the same, one by one, fer us. I thought, maybe, I'd git to handle sparklin' diamonds, if I acted as guide to the young lady; and I reckon the only thing I'm ever likely to see that's real

sparklin' bright is the mica shinin' in these here ledges. Kick me fer a fool, Cody, and I'll feel better! But I'm chantin' to you that whenever I do git back to town, if I have that luck, I'm goin' to have myself chained to the leg of a card-table, within easy hearin' distance of the clinkin' of the beer-glasses, so that I can't never stray away no more."

"I'm more than puzzled," Buffalo Bill admitted, not answering this wail; "I'm alarmed for the young lady."

"You don't think that dog skeered her away?"

"I don't know what to think. But it seems to me that, if the dog frightened her away, she would have tried to return, or answered my calls; and we would have seen her somewhere. She has disappeared completely."

"I reckon, Cody, you wouldn't feel like strikin' a trail fer the town?" said Bolivar wistfully.

"And leave her?"

"But if we can't find her, Cody!"

"We can continue the search."

"Cody, if we stay 'round here, there won't neither of us ever see that town ag'in. This country is bewitched, somehow. The girl's father dropped out of sight. Ingalls has dropped out of sight. The young lady has dropped out of sight. It will be one of us, next."

"You'd go back to the town and abandon her?" said the scout, with scorn.

"But, Cody, if we can't find her!"

The scout began to descend the hill, and Bolivar, still arguing thus, hopped to his feet and followed.

"We've got to keep together to pectect each other, Cody," he whispered, almost afraid to speak above his breath.

CHAPTER IX.

BOLIVAR'S STARTLING EXPERIENCE.

The scout and Bolivar spent the night near the base of the hill.

They were startled, and Bolivar was thrown into a panic, about midnight, by the discovery that Indians were below them.

"The Pawnees have returned," said the scout.

"How d'ye know they're Pawnees, Cody?"

"I heard one of them speak, and recognized the language."

"They've come back fer us?" said Bolivar, trembling.

"I think they have. They've had it out with the Sioux, and now they've returned to this point to see if we're still here, and to follow our trail in the morning if we were gone."

"We'll be dead men, Cody, to-morrow. We ought to have hit the trail for town before night came. I advised that, you'll recklect."

"I recollect that you advised abandoning further search for the young lady."

"But if we're killed out here, Cody, that ain't goin' to benefit her any."

"We've not been killed yet."

"Cody, I'll never venture into an Indian country ag'in! If the bushes out here were strung with diamonds big as apples, you couldn't hire me to. Life's worth more'n wealth, Cody."

They listened together now, for the Pawnees had drawn nearer.

"Will they climb up here, d'ye think?" Bolivar asked.

"Not before morning. They'd be afraid to try it. Yet they may send up a scout or two."

"What ye goin' to do?"

"Nothing at present, except keep quiet."

"They'll hear our horses!"

"They're more likely to hear *you*!"

That silenced Bolivar for a time.

But for the fact that he was unwilling to leave that vicinity while the fate of Miss Benton remained unknown, Buffalo Bill would have tried now to retreat from the hill with the horses and Bolivar. If he could have got off the hill without discovery, he could have been far away before morning. But he would not go until he had done all that he could to settle that mystery.

The strange disappearance of the girl troubled him so that even if the Pawnees had not been below, requiring wakefulness, he would not have been able to sleep.

The Pawnees sent a scout along the side of the hill, but through caution, or by accident, he did not come to the place where Buffalo Bill and Bolivar were in hiding.

Shortly before daybreak the scout decided to get closer to the spring.

He had seen that the Pawnees regarded it with fear, and that offered some protection to whoever was near it.

Bolivar at first refused to go, insisting on a flight toward the town while the darkness held; but, when he saw that Buffalo Bill was going without him, he changed his mind quickly.

The difficulty of getting the horses down without arousing the attention of the Pawnees promised to be so great that Buffalo Bill was about to abandon the idea and leave them there, when a thing occurred which favored him.

At the same time, it was so closely connected with the mystery which had puzzled them and given them that sleepless night that it was amazing enough.

A sudden commotion arose among the Pawnees, with shouts, and then a wild yell.

Buffalo Bill and Bolivar both tiptoed to hear, and to try to see.

The light in the east was increasing, with day just at hand.

"They're goin' to charge us?" gasped Bolivar.

"I don't know; I think not, though."

"Maybe some one's chargin' them?"

The scout lifted his hand for silence.

Then there reached them sounds as of running feet.

"They're chasin' some one!"

"Perhaps the girl!" said the scout.

He grasped his revolver, and moved down the slope.

Bolivar came crouching behind him.

Then they beheld dimly in the uncertain light the form of the big dog, running.

"The dog!" whispered Bolivar.

"He's bearing something on his back!" said the scout, bending forward. "And, as I live, it's a man!"

The dog disappeared from sight almost instantly behind a big rock.

The animal was making gigantic leaps, that bore it forward with almost the speed of a horse.

The man seen on its back was clinging, with arms round the dog's neck apparently, as if he were weak or wounded.

The dog had scarcely passed behind the rock when running Indian forms sprang across the opening, in pursuit.

Then Indian yells broke on the air.

"By all the dogs and cats of Egypt!" Bolivar gurgled.

"Say, Cody, that goes all of 'em one better, don't it? What does it mean?"

The scout was listening intently.

"I don't know what it means," he said suddenly, "but it gives us a chance to get the horses down near to the spring, while this racket and pursuit are on."

He ran to the horses.

"Jump lively, Bolivar. Imagine that a Pawnee is reaching for your hair, and you've got to get away from his scalping-knife as quickly as you can, and maybe that will help you to hurry."

He threw off the ropes that tied the horses, and started down the hill, and Bolivar came behind, leading one, and panting with excitement.

"Cody, if my raving hair ain't white in the mornin', it's because hair's quit turnin' that way frum fright and sich like. I kin feel it curlin' and sizzlin' round under my hat."

"Come along, and quiet," warned the scout.

They reached the vicinity of the spring in safety, and placed the horses among the rocks behind it.

"If the brutes would lie down, they'd be safe all the time from Pawnee arrows, and we might tie their feet and make them lie down, but I think I'll risk it without. The Pawnees won't shoot them so long as they think there's a chance that they can capture them, and us."

"They'll see the horses soon's it's light."

"There's no help for that, Bolivar."

"And then they'll come b'ilin' fer us!"

"And there's no help for that, either. We've got to take the chances. I'm pinning a good deal of faith in this spring to keep them back."

"Cody, we're dead men, soon's it's light enough for the redskins to shoot at us!"

He sank to a rock, fanning himself with his hat, and groaning. Again he was in a greasy perspiration of fear.

The Pawnee howls had ceased.

"Did they ketch him?" Bolivar asked anxiously.

"I think not. There was no yell of triumph, or exultation."

"What was it, Cody?"

"The dog and man?"

"Yes."

"A dog and a man."

"I didn't know if I seen right, er if it was a ghost, er what?"

He fanned himself wearily.

"Fer, ye see, Cody, sometimes when I've steamed up too long on bad whisky, and sich, I have spells of seein' a good many kinds of things that never existed—green rats with red tails, and lizards with two heads, and both bitin' at me, and a lot o' pleasant things like that. I didn't know but excitement was having the effect of the whisky, makin' me see things that never happened. But you seen the dog kerryin' the man, Cody, and the Pawnees streakin' it after 'em?"

"I saw that, all right."

"It makes me feel better to hear ye say it, Cody! This is my last trail, and I know it. And jes' about now, over in the town, the bums air crawlin' out to the saloons to git their mornin' cocktails. Cody, this is hard."

The gray of the dawn brightened slowly into full daylight.

Then it was discovered that the Pawnees were not near the spring, but off by the willows which lined the Platte, some distance away.

The discovery brought much relief to Bolivar.

But he again turned white, and trembled when Buffalo Bill informed him that he thought this a good opportunity to investigate the meaning of that dog and man seen early in the morning.

"I'd like to have you stay here with the horses, Bolivar, while I look about and try to pick up that dog's trail, and see where it went to. It may help to settle the mystery of the disappearance of Miss Benton."

"But if the Pawnees should come on me while you're gone?" Bolivar protested.

"I think they'll not. And I sha'n't be gone long."

"But they might, Cody!"

He started up, trembling.

"Cody, I think I'll go with you."

"But I want you to stay with the horses."

Bolivar dropped back reproachfully.

In another moment the scout was moving away, not giving Bolivar a chance to change his mind.

The scout had been gone but a few minutes when an

unearthly yell came from the vicinity of the spring. It was in the voice of Bolivar.

The scout turned immediately, and sprinted in that direction.

A glance showed him that the yell had reached to the Pawnees by the Platte.

A few leaps brought him in sight of the spring.

It had bubbled up as for an overflow, and the gaseous vapor was rising from it.

And then, to the scout's intense astonishment, Bolivar shot upward out of that smoke and out of the spring.

He rose, yelling; and, clutching the rim of the spring, began to draw himself out.

When Buffalo Bill arrived, Bolivar was lying on the sand by the spring, gasping and gurgling as if in a fit. Moreover, he was wet as the proverbial "drowned rat," showing that he had been in the water.

"Bolivar!"

Bolivar started up, gasping, his wet face purple and his eyes staring.

"Thank Heaven, Cody, it's you!"

He sat up, looked at the spring with a gurgle of fear, and then stared at his wet clothing.

A glance toward the Platte showed the scout that the Pawnees were not yet advancing.

"What happened to you, Bolivar? What made you fall into the spring?"

"Wow!" yelled Bolivar. "Fall into the spring? I didn't fall into the spring!"

"No?"

"No, sir, I didn't fall into the spring; I was pulled in, or, ruther, kerried in. And I had the gol-dingdest fight of my life, Cody."

He puffed out his cheeks. He was still alive, and his courage and boastfulness were coming back.

"Well, sir, Cody, you won't believe me, likely; but I had a fight that was a rip-snorter! You hadn't been gone long, and I was tryin' to see if the Pawnees was thinkin' of comin' this way, when I heard a patterin' of feet on the rocks there; and, when I turned, a creature sech as I never seen was rushin' on me. It wasn't a man—not any man, anyhow, like I'd ever seen before. Its eyes was shinin' like fire; and I can't better describe it than to say that fust glance I thought it was that dog standin' up on its hind legs. But it had a knife, big as a sword; and it jumped fer me.

"I hit back, beltin' it in the jaw; and then it swung its long arms round me; and, if you'll believe it, jumped with me into the spring.

"I let out a yell then, and follered it with a fight fer my life. Well, I fit some, I tell you! The thing was clawin' me and I was clawin' it, and we went down into the spring, both clawin'. I thought I was drowndin', and I guess I was fer a minute or so. But I got a grip on the critter's throat, and I held his head under the water,

chokin' like one bulldog chokin' another; and, sir, I drowned the thing!

"Cody, you won't believe it, but I drowned it. That is, if it was a man. I dunno if it was a man, er a demon! Do ye believe in demons? Well, sir, that beat anything I ever saw. Worse than the green rats with red tails and the two-headed lizards with both heads bitin' at ye at the same time; worse'n anything I ever experienced, Cody. And I'll swear I ain't lyin'."

He was panting and out of breath as he concluded, and stood back from the spring, staring at the boiling water with popping eyes.

That he had been engaged in a fearful struggle, or believed that he had, admitted of no doubt.

The scout gave another glance at the Pawnees by the willows, and then began to question Bolivar closely, to get at the truth of his extraordinary story.

However much he deviated in some of his details, Bolivar stuck to the main points.

"To tell the truth, Cody," he admitted, when pinned down, "I don't know what it looked like, er whether it was a man er an animal; but I know it jumped on me, when I wasn't expectin' anything; and I know it hopped into the spring with me, er maybe fell with me into the spring; and I know I fit like all possessed. There never was any madman out of a lunatic asylum fit wuss'n I did about then. And so would you've done, if you'd been in my place. Now, what was it, Cody?"

The scout stood close up by the spring, looking down into it.

"And I shore drowned it, Cody—whatever it was, man or beast, er superman, er whatever the thing was, I drowned it. If I didn't, it would rise to the surface."

The scout was expecting it to rise to the surface.

"The boiling motion of the water ought to throw it up," he admitted.

"It may've got tangled in that grass and stuff ye can see growin' there under the water," suggested Bolivar.

Their inspection of the spring and Bolivar's flow of talk concerning the strange "critter" that had "tackled" him were brought to an abrupt end by a commot among the Pawnees.

But Bolivar took time to voice still another opinion:

"Cody, I'm dead certain now that the girl was drowned in this spring by that critter. We heered her yell, you recklect, jes' as I did. She wasn't fur frum this spring, and it was dark. In my opinion, that critter throwed her in here, and that was the end of her. I'm bettin' dollars to drinks that her body is down there right now, held down by that grass, same's that critter's is."

He turned to stare into the spring again.

"If the thing had left any tracks we might have reached some conclusions," remarked the scout, now looking at the Pawnees.

"But it came patterin' over the rocks, Cody, and when

it grabbed me it jumped straight from off the rocks into the spring, without techin' the sand onc't. It was a big jump, but that thing could go through the air like any kangaroo."

CHAPTER X.

BUFFALO BILL CAPTURED.

In order to determine the cause of the excitement apparent now among the Pawnees, Buffalo Bill left the spring and ran up on the hillside.

Bolivar, afraid to remain near the spring, followed him.

What they saw destroyed one of Bolivar's theories at once, and filled them with surprise.

Miss Benton was out on the farthest side of the hill, and was running in the general direction of the spring, with a half-dozen mounted Pawnees galloping after her.

Bolivar's astonishment caused him to shake again like a wet dog.

"By all the jumpin' tarantulas of Texas, Cody," he began, the exclamation dying in a gurgle of amazement.

Buffalo Bill ran wildly toward the girl, hoping against hope to reach her in time to be of assistance.

But, when still a considerable distance off, he saw the leading Pawnee overtake her and swing from his horse.

The scout fired at him with his revolver, and saw the bullet tear up the sand at his feet.

The Pawnee swung a hatchet, and the terrified girl sank in fear to the ground.

Then the Pawnee clasped her round the waist, threw her to the back of his pony as if she were a bag of salt; after which he climbed up behind her, and rode off, shaking his lance defiantly toward the scout.

The other Pawnees closed round him.

Bolivar, left behind by Buffalo Bill's sharp run, stood on the rocks, opening and shutting his mouth like a dying fish. He was too astonished and fear-stricken even to find his voice.

The scout stopped.

It was useless to go farther. The Pawnees were in force down by the willows, and to attempt anything now would be simple madness.

He retreated toward Bolivar.

"Cody, that goes ahead of anything yit, except the man-devil that jumped with me into the spring. I was mistaken about her, I see. Where in the name o' time has she been all this while?"

The Pawnees had begun to advance from the willows toward the spring, shaking their lances and yelling.

Buffalo Bill and Bolivar retreated to the shelter of the rocks.

Bolivar eyed the spring askance, being now almost as much afraid of it as of the Indians. His wild-eyed searching of the rocks about it also showed his nervous fears.

He would have urged a flight on the horses, but for the patent fact that the danger of such a flight was greater than the danger of staying.

Nevertheless, he tried to keep a show of courage, and declared his intention of fighting to the last, and he re-examined his revolver, to make sure that it was loaded and in working condition.

"We'll die behind these here rocks, Cody, if we have to. We won't run!"

He was trembling, and his puffy face held a greasy pallor.

It was evident to the scout that the Pawnees intended to charge the rocks, and he prepared for a desperate battle.

He could not now see the girl, who had been taken by her captor back toward the river.

When just beyond rifle-shot, the Pawnees halted, and held a conference, with much gesticulation.

"Then they spread out in a wide half-moon, and, putting their ponies at a wild gallop, they rode at the rocks which hid the scout and Bolivar.

As they did so they fired their rifles and sent in a shower of arrows.

Bolivar emptied every chamber of his revolver, but was so poor a marksman and so terrified that every bullet went over the heads of the Pawnees.

Buffalo Bill drew on the warrior in the center, who seemed to be the leader, and tumbled him from the back of his pony.

The yelling Pawnees threw themselves behind their ponies, using the bodies of the animals for shields.

Again and again the scout's rifle spoke, and ponies tumbled to the sand, hurling their riders down; but the desperate Pawnees came straight on, yelling with increased ferocity.

Bolivar shrieked with fear, and, diving behind the scout, lay prostrate on the ground, shaking in every muscle.

"Cody, we're dead men!" he howled, in the extremity of his terror.

The spring boiled up and puffed out its gaseous vapor, but it did not now stop that wild rush; the Pawnees rode right up to the rocks.

The scout rose to his feet, pistoling the Indian who was trying to reach him with a lance, and then fell, struck to the earth by a lance-head.

Bolivar lay howling on the ground, his face close against it.

An Indian thrust his lance over the tops of the rocks and prodded him in the back, and Bolivar sat up with a jerk and a scream of fright.

His face was livid, his eyes rolling, his teeth chattering. "Please—please!" he yelled. "Don't! Oh, don't! I'll do anything ye want me to—I'll—Wow!"

The lance-point had touched him again, gashing his coat and ripping open the skin beneath it.

Bolivar fell to the ground in terror, but continued to howl and to beg for mercy.

The Pawnees were jumping from their horses and leaping over the rocks.

They surrounded him, lifting him to his feet, and one waved a scalping-knife over his head.

Bolivar was so spineless with fright that he had no more supporting strength now than a jellyfish, and sank down when, at the shouted command of a chief, the supporting hands were removed from him.

Then he saw that Buffalo Bill appeared to be dead, and that the Pawnees were stooping over him.

"There goes Cody's hair, and I'll be scalped and killed next!" he moaned.

Instead of scalping Buffalo Bill, two of the Indians knelt by him, discovering that he was not dead, but that the lance which had struck him down had only gashed his head.

The Pawnees grouped now about him, all talking at once, though one stopped long enough now and then to let out a blood-curdling yell of victory.

A few Pawnees came galloping from the direction of the river, to share in the wild rejoicing over the capture of the noted and dreaded Long Hair.

Bolivar was left for a minute or two quite alone.

He looked round.

Close by him stood a pony, its rawhide bridle-rein trailing on the ground.

The wild thought that came to him he tried to put into action, by leaping to the back of the pony, making a jump that would have done credit to an athlete.

He struck his heels into the flanks of the pony, yelling at it; but a long arm reached out and caught him by one of his thrashing legs, and he was dragged incontinently to the ground.

It was the owner of the pony who did this; and to reward Bolivar for his attempt, this Pawnee kicked him heavily in the ribs, causing him to double up like a jack-knife and drop over, groaning with fright and pain.

Bolivar now began to sham dead, and lay on his back, with his mouth open, and tried to stop as much as possible his breathing.

But he saw, out of the tail of his eye, that Miss Benton had been brought up from the willows, and that she was tied to the back of a pony.

"It's *you* air the cause of all this," thought Bolivar. "If you hadn't sung yer sweet song to Cody he wouldn't been here; and I wouldn't been here, either, but fer yer honeyed tongue. You said 'diamonds' and we come, b'ilin' over with enthusiasm; and this is the result. A man allus gits into a tangle when he goes to foolin' round tryin' to aid a woman. So help me, Joshua, if I live to git through this, I'll never look at one ag'in!"

Then he closed his eyes and played dead once more.

The Pawnees were paying little attention to Bolivar.

They were too wildly jubilant over the capture of the noted Long Hair. Bolivar was small fry.

The horses behind the rock barricade they brought out, and showed surprise when they saw the "creased" Pawnee pony, which Buffalo Bill had used. They examined the "crease" wound, and talked excitedly about it; they had never beheld "creasing" done in so marvelous a manner. They knew it was the work of Long Hair.

By this time Buffalo Bill was slowly returning to consciousness.

As he struggled back to life, the Pawnees stood about him; and, when he at length opened his eyes and seemed to understand the situation in which he was placed, they yelled in a manner to shake the nerves of a man unused to such things.

Buffalo Bill put a hand to his bloody head, touching the wound made by the lance.

He saw the Pawnees ringed round him, saw Bolivar "possuming" on the ground, and also beheld the girl not far off, sitting, bound, on the back of a pony.

The great scout's face was already pale from the effect of the wound. He was dizzy and sick, and his head thumped with torturing pain. He said nothing, as the Indians jabbered and screamed at him.

When they commanded him to stand up he did so, though he reeled from weakness.

Bolivar beheld him standing thus, through half-closed eyes; but closed his eyes quickly when one of the Pawnees looked at him.

He heard one of the chiefs making a harsh speech to the scout, and heard the scout's quiet answer, but understood neither.

A Pawnee came toward him now, and Bolivar lay as inert as he could.

But when the Pawnee, grinning, for he saw the deception, tickled Bolivar in the side with his lance-point, Bolivar "waked" with a jerk.

Seeing the lance waved before his eyes, he sat up with a howl, lifting his hands to push the lance away.

"Don't!" he yelled. "Please—please don't! I'll do anything you tell me to. Please—I'll——"

"Fat coward, git up!"

The words were English, and plain enough, if not complimentary; and when the command was emphasized with a prod of the lance-point, Bolivar scrambled to his feet.

"Yes—yes!" he said. "I'll—git up! Don't stick that in me! I'm yer friend, ye know—a friend to all Indians! First time any of you come into the town I'll prove it; I'll load you up with all the fire-water you kin kerry, and—Wow! Quit stickin' that into me!"

"Fat coward, walk!" said the Pawnee, grinning.

Other Pawnees surrounded Bolivar, grinning and

gesticulating; they delighted to see his cowardly antics. This man, they saw, was of a different quality from Long Hair.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

It was late that afternoon before Buffalo Bill found a chance for a few words with Miss Benton.

He had longed for a quiet talk with her, that he might understand the mystery of her sudden disappearance.

Contrary to his expectations, the Pawnees had not departed from their position by the Platte. Apparently, they were watching for Sioux. The scout had also discovered that they had sent riders off with messages to other bands of Pawnees, and they were awaiting the coming of these.

This latter was far from reassuring. It told the experienced scout that he, and possibly those with him, had been reserved for torture; that these other Pawnees had been sent for that they might, with their friends, have the joy of seeing Long Hair endure the fire ordeal and all the other devilish, pain-inflicting devices which Indian malignity can invent.

But while there is life there is hope! The scout did not forget that.

He sorrowed more over the position of Miss Benton than over his own; and he even felt a great sympathy for poor Bolivar, who had been reduced by terror to a pitiable condition.

Buffalo Bill had been left with Miss Benton and Bolivar in the willows by the river, where they were guarded by Pawnee sentries.

They were tied, also, to make them more secure.

The other Pawnees were off on the plains, scouting, or on the rocky hill, scanning the surrounding country.

"I have been wondering what happened to you," the scout said quietly to the girl. "It has been a puzzling mystery."

Bolivar ceased to groan and anathematize his fate, and pricked up his ears to listen.

"I have been wanting to tell you, but was afraid to say anything while we were so closely watched," she answered. "I had a very singular and startling adventure, and have been so puzzled I don't know what to think."

Her face flushed and her eyes brightened. Yet the marks of distress, both mental and physical, were so apparent that the scout's heart ached for her.

"We have all had queer adventures," he remarked, watching her with sympathy.

"You heard me when I screamed that time?" she said. "I was looking down into the bed of that little stream, and hadn't heard a thing; but without my knowing it a man had come up behind me. I just caught a glimpse

of him, and thought him an Indian, and I screamed because I couldn't help it; and then he threw something over my head, and, picking me up in his arms, he carried me away."

"Same feller that tried to drown me in the spring, I'll bet!" said Bolivar.

"The man wasn't an Indian?" said the scout.

"No; he was a white man; yet the strangest white man I ever saw. I didn't really get to see his face, nor more than half a glimpse of him; but he had the voice of a white man. He carried me away, with that cloth, or whatever it was, over my head.

"I fainted, I think; for the next I remember I was in some kind of a dark place, like a cave or a dark cabin, and my hands and feet were tied."

"He didn't try to drown ye in the spring?" said Bolivar.

"I didn't know where I was," she went on, not directly answering Bolivar's question. "But I heard the man talking with some one, and knew by his voice that he was a white man. They were in another room, I think; and I heard him laughing in there."

"And that must have been near here?" Buffalo Bill queried.

"I couldn't be sure of it at the time, but I know now that it was somewhere on the side of that hill. For, when I escaped from the place finally and got out into daylight, I was on the side of that hill."

"Wow! ye escaped!" commented Bolivar, his interest in the story making him almost forget his own position.

"Not right away," she answered. "I was kept there in the dark a long time. By and by the man came in, bringing me something to eat and drink; and he took the cords off my wrists when he put the food before me."

"You must 've seen him, then?" said Bolivar.

"But not his face; he had a cloth over it."

"Jeewhittaker! That seems to spell road-agent, Cody!"

"He means," explained Buffalo Bill, "that the road-agents one encounters in this section of the country are generally seen masked."

"Road-agents?"

"Highwaymen are called road-agents out here."

"Oh! Well, he might have been a highwayman, and I think he was. And I think"—her voice sank to a whisper—"that he is the murderer of my father!"

"Christopher Columbus! Ye don't mean it?" Bolivar gasped.

"The reason I think so is this," she said, leaning toward the scout, and glancing round to make sure no Pawnee was near, "As I stumbled out of the place, the first time I was left there without my wrists tied, I put my hands on a string of diamonds resting in a niche in the wall."

"Diamonds?" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Yes; and when I saw what they were I looped them round my neck, and brought them out with me. The man had gone away a short time before. He was sick, or hurt, or something, I thought; and he had ceased to pay much attention to me. He did not tie my wrists after giving me something to eat. With my hands free, it didn't take me long to untie my ankles, and then I began to try to find my way out.

"I found the diamonds, as I said, while doing that. And then I came out into daylight, through a hole in the rocks, where there were a lot of bushes.

"I didn't know where I was, for the country was unfamiliar. I set out down the hill, hoping to find you. The diamonds were round my neck, and I examined them, and saw that they were really diamonds, if I am any judge. I kept on going, hurrying fast.

"I was hunting for you and Mr. Bolivar, when the Pawnees saw me and chased me. I ran as fast as I could, but I was captured."

"And the diamonds?" said the scout.

"Are round my neck now, concealed by my dress. The Indians made no close search, and failed to discover them."

"Diamonds!" Bolivar was gasping.

"I am sure they are diamonds," she said, answering him.

"My father was surrounded by Pawnees, and fighting for his life not many miles from this place, according to that note you found, Mr. Cody," she went on. "He must have escaped from the Pawnees. He came on to this point, probably, or near here, and these men murdered him. That would account for the diamonds I found. I have a feeling that they belonged to my father, which is the reason I took them. Otherwise, I should have left them there. My father had a fortune in diamonds, which he was bringing across the plains, when he mysteriously disappeared."

"You didn't get to see the other man you heard this fellow talking with?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"No."

"He might, then, have been talking to himself?"

"But he was asking questions of the other man, and I heard the other man answer him," she objected. "I'm satisfied a band of robbers have their hiding-place near here, and that I was carried into it."

Bolivar began to bubble over with his story of the man who had tried to drown him in the spring.

"It's my opinion he's the same man tackled you," he asserted.

"And I'm satisfied," she declared, "that we're dealing with a band of highwaymen, and that all the mysterious things which have happened can be explained by that."

"Well, I drowned one of 'em!" Bolivar boasted. "And he couldn't 've been the one the dog was carryin' home wounded, Cody. You recklect what we saw the dog doin'?"

"Doesn't it go to show that a band of outlaws are close by here?" she argued. "How far from here is the Overland Trail?"

"Less than a day's ride?" the scout answered.

"Then this would be a good hiding-place for outlaws operating on the Overland Trail. They could dash in easily and rob a pony-express rider, or the Overland Express, and then get back to their hiding-place here and feel safe."

"The only thing that puzzles me, in connection with that theory," said Bolivar, "is, that I never heerd of an outlaw yit that didn't want to be right where he could spend his money about as fast as he got hold of it; and so, generally speakin', they're either in towns, er where they kin git into towns without trouble; fer money burns their fingers, and they ain't happy till they're spending it on liquor and cards and other things that they think makes 'em happy. But, Cody!"

He rolled over and looked out through the willows.

"Everything is so powerful quiet, now, that mebbe we could do Miss Benton's trick, and git out o' this. D'ye reckon if I rolled over close to you that ye could git the cords off my wrists? We could go right on talkin', ye know, and maybe fool these red gentlemen into thinkin' we're jes' carryin' on a quiet conversation."

But when Bolivar rolled over and thrust out his hands in that way he discovered that the Pawnee sentinels were wide-awake and watchful.

One of them came hurrying up to the little group of prisoners, speaking harshly and swinging a threatening lance.

Bolivar rolled back with a shiver of fright.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ATTACK OF THE SIOUX.

A little later wild cries came from the slopes of the hill, and the Pawnees who had been there rode rapidly down to the willows.

The Pawnees had been thrown into a flutter of excitement by discovering that a band of Sioux, perhaps the band they had recently fought with, was out on the plains, advancing toward the Platte.

They retreated from the river up the valley of the smaller stream, and halted in the rocks close by the spring, using thus the same measures for their protection that the scout and Bolivar had adopted.

They kept a little farther off from the spring, however, showing their superstitious fears regarding it, a thing that the prisoners noticed.

The latter were tied even more securely, and deposited in the rocky stronghold, where, for a time, little attention was paid to them.

The Pawnees gave their heed to the coming Sioux, whose position and movements were signaled from the hill.

From the excited talk Buffalo Bill learned that the Sioux were following the trail of the Pawnees to the stream.

A little later they came in sight, after fording the river.

When they discerned signs which told them that the Pawnees had been there but a few minutes before, their loud yells reached to the rocky hillside where the Pawnees now lay in concealment with their ponies hid among the rocks behind them.

"There will be some fighting," Buffalo Bill prophesied.

Though Bolivar trembled from the excess of his fright, his eyes began to shine.

"It'll give us a chance, won't it, Cody?" he asked. "I'd like to have 'em play the trick of the Kilkenny cats, and simply exterminate each other. It's the only thing that will give us any chance, ain't it, Cody?"

"If the Sioux should drive the Pawnees back from here, and at the same time not disturb us, we might have hope of twisting out of these cords and getting away before the victorious party returned," the scout answered, assuming a hopefulness on that point he did not feel.

The wild yells of the Sioux rose loudly as they followed the trail of the Pawnees toward the spring.

Bolivar lay on the ground, groaning with fright.

"Cody, we're done fer!" he declared. "If I ever let good impulses drag me into danger ag'in may I be shot! I beg yer pardon fer sayin' it, Miss Benton; but if I hadn't come out here I'd be now listenin' to the pianner tinklin' in the Superba saloon and h'istin' the ruby wine to my thirsty lips. I reckon I'll never know the taste of good wine ag'in, ner see the twinklin' lights of the Superba."

"I am very sorry," she said, and she meant it. "We thought we were safe, you know."

"If I ever meet up with the guy that tole me the Indians out here were so tame that they'd eat out of yer hands like tame rattlesnakes, I'll cave his head in," said Bolivar.

Then he shivered again.

"Wow! Cody, hear 'em yell!"

The Pawnees were yelling back at the Sioux.

They stood behind the rocks, lances, bows and arrows, and knives in their hands, their fierce, dark faces aflame with hatred of their hereditary enemies.*

*When in later years Buffalo Bill had both Pawnees and Sioux in his Wild West Show, he found it impossible to keep them from fighting.

Buffalo Bill began quietly to work at the cords on his wrists, while the attention of the Pawnees was thus diverted.

Seeing it, Bolivar began also to squirm and twist at the cords that held him.

"Drop it, Bolivar!" the scout whispered. "You'll attract their notice, I'm afraid. Let me see if I can do anything. If I can, of course I'll release you. I've got a knife in an inner pocket of my hunting-shirt, if I could only get at it."

Bolivar subsided, and lay on the ground, gasping.

Those deafening yells were very terrifying to Nellie Benton. She wanted to put her hands over her ears to shut them out. Never had she seen and heard human beings who so made her think of fiends as these yelling Pawnees.

As the Sioux advanced upon the rocks the Pawnees fired upon them, sending a shower of arrows and using the few rifles they possessed, and also the weapons taken from Buffalo Bill and Bolivar.

Buffalo Bill's splendid rifle was used with telling effect by a brawny Pawnee chief, who seemed to know how to handle it almost as well as a white man.

He shot two Sioux chiefs from the backs of their ponies with it; and so desperate was the Pawnee resistance that the Sioux were forced to retreat, which they did with yells of rage and a rapid riding of ponies.

Then how the Pawnees howled their joy and defiance!

The demoniacal sound was even worse than before, making Miss Benton shudder as she listened to it.

Buffalo Bill was still straining at the cords on his wrists.

Bolivar lay flat on the ground, trembling with fear. The Pawnees, still yelling, leaped out beyond the barricade of rocks, shaking their lances, firing their rifles, and discharging their arrows.

Buffalo Bill tugged at his bonds, hoping now to break them.

As he did so a low gurgle of fright escaped from the lips of Bolivar, without, however, drawing Buffalo Bill's attention, for Bolivar was continually groaning and gurgling.

Then a human form, clad half in skins, with a wild beard sweeping down on its breast, leaped lightly in from the rear.

An enormous, wolfish dog accompanied this strange figure.

A quick thrust of a keen-edged knife cut the cords that held Bolivar's ankles together.

Bolivar leaped up, a strange bellow breaking from his lips.

It drew the attention of Buffalo Bill, and was also heard by the Pawnees, who had been giving their whole attention to the Sioux.

Then Buffalo Bill beheld a sensational thing.

The strange wild figure, knowing that he had to move quickly, abandoned his seeming purpose of going also to the aid of Buffalo Bill, and caught up the girl, swinging her up as lightly as if she were a feather.

Bolivar was already moving his legs in a frantic effort at escape, impelled by terror of the Pawnees and of this man.

Yells of surprise and rage burst from the Pawnees, whose attention had been drawn.

Having caught up Miss Benton, the skin-clad man sprang with her over the rocks, leaping them as lightly with this burden as if he were winged.

Bolivar was running wildly in the same direction, in advance of this man, swinging his bound hands.

Yelling furiously, the Pawnees came lunging over the barricade to stop this flight.

The foremost was a brawny brave who had set his heart on the beauty of Miss Benton, intending to make her his squaw.

His roaring yell of wrath boomed across the rocky hill in a way to make one shudder.

He poised his lance, intending to drive it through the body of the man; but as he did so the wolfish dog flew at his throat and brought him to the ground, the lance-head being driven into the ground, breaking the head short off.

The furious attack of the dog stopped the rush of the Pawnees. The dog had set its teeth in the throat of the warrior and was shaking him as a cat shakes a rat.

The other braves rushed to his aid, yelling at the dog, and striking it with their lances; and the fight that followed baffles description.

The dog turned from the brave he had downed, and though a lance pierced his shoulder, he furiously assailed the Pawnees, making so fierce an onset that they were driven back.

Though fascinated almost to the point of being spell-bound by this fierce struggle taking place right before his eyes, Buffalo Bill still tugged at the cords that held him; for this was the great opportunity to escape, if he could but release those confining cords.

The terrible combat with the dog was ended at length by a lance driven through its body.

By this time most of the Pawnee warriors were round the struggling beast.

But now, with yells, when it was seen that the dog had been killed, some of them set out to pursue Bolivar and the rescuer of the girl captive.

They were in a mad rage, not only because of the daring of this invasion, but over the fact that three of their warriors had been fearfully mangled and almost killed by the dog.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PERIL.

The beaten and baffled Pawnees came back in a blind fury, without bringing Bolivar, the girl, or the man.

They were but little mollified when they discovered that their enemies, the Sioux, were retreating from the vicinity of the river, because of the approach of parties of Pawnees that had been sent for earlier in the day.

When the new arrivals had crossed the river and joined their friends by the spring, and it was known that the Sioux had departed, matters began to look black for Buffalo Bill.

He was the only enemy on whom the Pawnees could now satisfy their hatred. He had slain some of their best warriors. He was one of their deadliest foes. They believed, also, that the skin-clad man who had sprung among them with that enormous dog was the scout's friend, and that did not elevate Buffalo Bill in their estimation.

Moreover, they had summoned these other bands of Pawnees for the express purpose of torturing him in their presence for their mutual edification.

Buffalo Bill fully understood his critical position.

But he was helpless, bound hand and foot, and with apparently no one near to aid him.

After the coming of the Pawnee allies, another search was made for the trail of the missing prisoners and their singular rescuer.

The body of the dog had been beaten and mangled until it was an unrecognizable mass of flesh and bones; and, having failed even thus to satisfy their rage, they desired to lay hands on the supposed owner of the dog and on those he had assisted.

Night was fast coming on, for the sun had set; and because of the poor light, for one thing, the trail sought was not found.

Big fires were now kindled, which shot up into the gathering darkness. These, it was supposed, would keep off the demon the Pawnees believed inhabited the spring.

But for their fear that the Sioux might return and attack in the night they would have moved away from the spring. This fear kept them close to it, for the protection of the rocks that here made such an excellent position for fighting.

After feasting on the buffalo meat brought in by the visiting Pawnees, the Indians began to dance and yell round the fires.

They dragged Buffalo Bill, bound, up by the largest of the fires, and there shouted at him their hate and condemnation.

The fact that he was now the only one on whom they could vent their hate seemed to make them even more furious.

They slashed him with pony-whips, as he lay bound on the ground by the fire, and they spat their hate at him, telling him that he was a coward, and loading him with all the vile epithets they could think of.

All this the great scout bore with a stoicism that was Indianlike.

He knew that he had been condemned to die, and he began to fear that his end had truly come; yet he made no sign that would please them. Not a sound came from his lips when the pony-whips cut his skin.

Even before that his physical condition was not good, for he had not recovered from the lance-wound on his head.

"Let them do their worst," he thought, "it will bring the end the quicker."

And then he began to taunt them, in their own Indian style, hoping that if they had made up their minds to kill him, and there was no chance of escape, that would drive them to finish their work at once.

Soon the maddened Pawnees, smarting under this tongue-lashing, set a green cottonwood post in the ground close by the fire, tied the scout to it, and heaped up round him a quantity of wood, much of which was green and mixed through with green leaves.

They meant to roast him in a slow fire, and, while he thus expired with incalculable tortures, to sing and howl round him, upbraiding and belittling him and glorifying the greatness of the Pawnee nation and their own individual prowess.

As the fire which they kindled sprang up about the feet of the scout, lighting, with the camp-fires, the gathering darkness, a flash of flame shot from the hillside some distance away, and a bullet cut down the Indian who had applied the torch to the heaped-up wood.

The Pawnees dancing round the fire stopped their wild gyrations and dropped down behind the rocks, and then, seizing their weapons, began to creep like cats in the direction of the point from which the shot had come.

As they did so another bullet came singing into their midst, but without doing any damage.

Buffalo Bill's hopes were keenly alive now.

Yet the manner in which help was to come to him he could not guess.

He tried with his knees to thrust away the burning wood that was scorching his clothing and his legs, and as he did so he became aware that the cords which held his ankles together and bound them to the post had been eaten through by the fire.

His feet were free, but his arms were tied together and to the post, and his body was bound to the post; so that, though his feet were free, he was not able to get away.

But he kicked away the burning brands.

As he did so, thus attracting the attention of the

nearest Pawnee, the latter swung his hatchet, facing with threatening mien round toward him.

The Pawnee with the hatchet fell prostrate at the same moment, knocked down by a stone that was hurled from somewhere; and at almost the same instant the skin-clad man before seen sprang to the side of Buffalo Bill.

There was as before the lightninglike thrusts of a knife, cutting through the cords that held the scout to the post and bound his arms and wrists.

The Pawnee knocked over gave a yell, and other Pawnees yelled in unison with him.

Buffalo Bill was about to spring away in flight, yet found his legs were so stiff because of their long constriction by the cords that they felt cumbersome.

Nevertheless, he started to run, heading toward the spring, not knowing a better course to take.

A revolver flashed in the hand of one of the Pawnees, and there was a simultaneous twang of bowstrings, with more wild yells.

Buffalo Bill saw that the skin-clad man was running at his side with tremendous leaps.

Then the wild clamor of an angry pursuit rose in a hubbub, with the hurtling hiss of more arrows and the flashes of other firearms, none doing any damage.

The scout, running faster as his legs limbered with the exertion, was about to pass the spring, which he saw rising for its periodic overflow.

But just then the man, with a great leap, caught him in his arms, lifting him with an abnormal exhibition of strength, and before the scout understood his intention or could resist, the man had plunged into the boiling spring with him.

The pursuing Indians yelled wildly at that sight, for the scout and the man disappeared.

As they thus went down, the gaseous vapor that rose like a puff of smoke out of the troubled water flashed into a flame of fire, burning blue on the surface of the spring.

It was so startling, and altogether so weird an exhibition, that the Pawnees drew back in clamorous alarm, their superstitious fear concerning the spring reasserting itself.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUFFALO BILL'S DISCOVERY.

Clasped tightly in the arms of the skin-clad man, Buffalo Bill felt for an instant that he was drowning.

Then the man rose with him out of the water into a cavernous room of rock.

The sight the scout beheld as soon as he got the water out of his eyes was the most amazing thing in his experience.

For there before him on a rocky shelf by the edge

of the water stood Nellie Benton, holding up a torch which lighted this singular place. She was trembling and agitated, and almost let the torch fall as the scout and the man shot thus out of the water together.

The scout scrambled, dripping wet, out upon the rock, and saw the skin-clad man dancing like a wet dog beside him.

But faintly he heard the startled cries of the Pawnees, as if they were far away, though he knew they must be quite near.

The girl ran down and held out her hand as if to help Buffalo Bill up the wet slope.

"Miss Benton!" was all he could gasp at first.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said, almost hysterically.

The skin-clad man stopped his wild dancing, and stood listening to the faint yells.

"I must see that!" he exclaimed suddenly, and darted away out of sight, vanishing in a rocky gallery that led upward.

"Miss Benton," said Buffalo Bill, feeling dazed and hardly sure of himself, "I hope I'm not dreaming!"

"Not at all," she said, brightening. "It is too good to be true, yet it is true."

The scout reeled, panting, to a seat on the rock.

"And where are we?" he asked, as she stood solicitously beside him.

"In the heart of the hill."

"The hill by the spring?"

"Yes."

"I got here by way of the spring, of course."

"Yes; and the thing is as simple as day, though when you come to think of it, what we call simple as day is a most wonderful thing. And so with this spring."

"I feel as if I am dreaming."

"You're wide-awake, and safe. Think of it—safe!"

"And grateful."

"Yes, it is very simple," she went on enthusiastically. "This water is part of a pool of which the spring is the overflow. Back there, on the other side of the water we see, is a flow of what must be petroleum, or else natural gas, which mixes with the water and rises on the spring as a gaseous vapor. It will burn with a blue flame, when lighted, that man told me; and he said that sometimes he lighted the vapor on the pool at night and let it burn for the purpose of frightening off Indians. He says he has made them think the spring is haunted, and I don't wonder at it."

"And who is he?" asked the scout, hungry for information.

"I don't know. I told you I thought he was the murderer, or one of the murderers, of my father. I don't believe that now. But I know so little about him yet. He has not given me much chance to talk with him."

"And you?" persisted the scout. "How did you get here?"

"He released Mr. Bolivar and me, you remember. He lifted me up and ran with me to a hidden opening in the cave on the side of the hill. Bolivar ran with him, or in front of him, and he pulled him into that hole at the same time, while the Pawnees were fighting his dog; and we hid down in here while the Pawnees searched for us. It's a cunning opening, concealed by bushes, and I rather think it's the one I got out by that time. For you see, this seems to be the place I was held in before; and this is the man who held me."

"There was another man, then, you said?"

"I thought so; but I haven't seen him yet. He may be out somewhere. As I said, I haven't had a chance, hardly, to talk with this half-wild fellow."

"And Bolivar?"

"He is back in here somewhere, scared to death almost."

"I suppose he did the shooting, which gave the man a chance to rescue me just now? Or, perhaps, the other man did that!"

She was about to attempt further explanations, when the man appeared, slipping down from the rocky gallery with the agility of a monkey.

"Oh, it's great!" he exclaimed, hopping excitedly on the rocks. "The Pawnees are in a panic. The gas is still burning on the spring where I lighted it as I jumped with you into the water, and they are thinking all kinds of queer things about it."

"They must think we were drowned," said the scout.

He recalled vividly that Bolivar had said some one leaped with him into that spring, and that he drowned the one who did it.

Buffalo Bill knew now that it was this man who seized Bolivar at that time, and that he had not been drowned. No doubt, he had then been trying to take Bolivar to this cave.

He looked keenly at the man, and saw many evidences of insanity in his words and actions.

The girl was also looking curiously and in half fright at the capering figure.

"Now, I must see about the other one!" the man cried.

He darted away again, taking this time another gallery.

"He is crazy, I judge!" said the scout.

"Yet he has helped us."

"Yes; and we'll not condemn the bridge that takes us over to safety. There has been method in the fellow's madness."

"He's coming back," she said, holding up the torch.

"He stationed you here?" the scout queried.

"Yes. He told me the Pawnees were going to burn you at the stake, and that he was going to save you; and he asked me to stand here with the torch. Then he

explained to me what I've told you about the spring, saying if he could get you free he would jump into the spring with you; and he wanted me to stand here with the torch to light this place when he came out of the water with you. At first I couldn't believe he meant it; but he assured me over and over that he did; and then I agreed to do as he wished, and——"

She stopped.

Running footsteps, heard before, approached them; and Bolivar came bouncing out into the light.

"Wow!" he bawled, in a delirium of excitement and ecstasy, "Cody, it's you! By all the hoppin' horned toads of Texas, it's shore you! And I thought you was dead, and I was goin' to be dead soon, and—but, Cody, shake!"

His face looked pale under the light of the torch, and his eyes were rolling.

"Cody," he said, grabbing at the scout's hand, "we've struck Wonderland, and the man what owns it. He's a lunny, but he's got more sense than any ten men outside of a lunatic asylum. He's got the most marvelous place in here. Why, it outshines the Superba saloon and all its glitter of glass and chandeliers. You ought to see it with the lights on it. Miss Benton, let Cody see the roof of this palace!"

She flashed the light of the torch upward.

What the scout saw were many glittering stalactites on the roof of the cave, flashing back the torchlight like gems.

The scout rose to his feet. He still felt the stir of strange excitement, and he was willing to admit everything wonderful that could be said about the man and the cave. As he thus stood up the water dripped from him, making wet pools on the stone floor.

"Cody, it's the same feller that I thought I drowned that time. I admit I was mistook about that."

"I suppose you fired those rifle-shots out on the hillside, which drew the attention of the Pawnees, and gave him a chance to release me?"

Bolivar's eyes opened still wider.

"Cody, I didn't; nor didn't know about it! I thought I heard shots, but——"

"Then there is another man in here with this strange fellow," said the scout emphatically. "And I had been thinking that Miss Benton must have heard him talking to his dog that time, and only fancied she heard answers."

"The dog is dead!" cried Bolivar.

"Yes. It made a gallant fight, though, before it went under."

"The man's as much of a fighter as that dog was, Cody. He is a wonder. And there he comes now."

They heard footsteps hurrying toward them along the passage taken by the skin-clad eccentric.

"Yes, there he comes!" said Bolivar. "He's been

tellin' me some things, but I'd like to have him explain a few more, for I'm that excited and turned round I don't know whether I'm on my heels or on my head."

CHAPTER XV.

BACK TO LIFE.

Miss Nellie Benton uttered a scream when she beheld the man whose footsteps they had heard.

She dropped the torch, which fell sputtering and was caught up by Buffalo Bill, and ran with hysterical cries and sobs to this man, throwing herself on his breast.

Buffalo Bill stared, and then uttered a cry of joy and amazement.

The man was none other than the girl's lover, Leonard Ingalls.

He was pale, and his head was bandaged with a cloth in a clumsy manner; yet the scout recognized him at a glance.

He knew, then, that the man whose voice the girl had heard, but had not distinguished, was young Ingalls, the youth who had been with him when the Pawnees surprised them in ambush, and whom he had searched for, and for some time had believed was dead.

Ingalls had his arms round Nellie Benton, and was quite as wildly rapturous as she was herself.

She had not expected thus to meet her lover, but the rapture of the meeting was all the greater because of the surprise; and they forgot that others were present for the time.

Weeping with joy, she disengaged herself from his arms, and turned to the scout and Bolivar.

"He is alive!" she cried, as if they could not see that for themselves.

The scout stepped forward.

"Ingalls," he said, his voice choking, "let me welcome you back from what we believed at least to be the land of death. I suppose this strange man has helped you, too?"

"Yes," said Ingalls, "and it seems too good to believe that you are still alive, when until a short time ago I thought the Pawnees had killed you. But I might have known that your wonderful luck would remain with you."

"He found you?" said the scout.

He was shaking Ingalls by the hand, while the young man had his other hand lovingly on the girl's shoulder.

Bolivar stood by, staring, for the once not finding a word to say.

"Yes, he found me, after the Pawnees had rushed on after you. I suppose they meant to come back for me, but he carried me here; and he brought me back to life, and took care of me. He has had me in a room over there somewhere, until to-night; when he came to

me and asked me if I could shoot a rifle. He said the Pawnees had a white man they were about to burn at the stake, and if I could shoot a rifle, and would open on them, he would try to rescue the man.

"I said I could shoot pretty well; and he took me to some place out on the hill, and then ran back, and he said for me to count slowly up to two hundred, which would give him time to get where he wanted to be, and then for me to open on them.

"When I saw the Indians and the man they had, I discovered it was you, Cody. But I obeyed instructions, counting out two hundred, and then I began to shoot. I downed the fellow who lighted the fire about you, and then pumped away at the others, while this man jumped to help you."

He looked with strong admiration upon the scout.

Then he looked at the girl.

"Cody, I hope we're not all dreaming!"

"It would be too sad to awake from a dream like this!" said Nellie Benton.

* * * * *

Things almost as wonderful as those recounted, but which have been somewhat foreshadowed, and may have been already guessed by the reader, were soon revealed to Buffalo Bill and his companions.

The skin-clad man, returning, stood for a time in front of the girl, studying her face closely.

"I think you are my wife!" he said, in so strange and solemn a way that she was almost frightened.

Having said this, he darted away, and returning soon he looped about her neck a string of diamonds.

He went away again, and brought back to her other diamonds, in ropes and crosses; diamonds that were cut and uncut, a whole array of glittering gems of great value and marvelous beauty.

And then, by degrees, came the revelation, brought out by his wild statements and by the questions of Buffalo Bill and his companions.

He was her father, the man who had tried to cross the plains with a fortune in diamonds, and had dropped out of sight; the man who, when surrounded by Pawnees and thinking he could not escape, had written the note on the torn scrap of note-paper, which later Buffalo Bill and Ingalls had found.

The fact that she much resembled her mother had stirred in him that recollection of his wife.

In his running flight from the Pawnees, and before being surrounded by them, he had cunningly dropped his diamonds in a waste of rocks, without them knowing it.

He had been shot by the Pawnees, but not killed, and the wound depriving him of his reason, he had been

kept by them for a time, escaping one night in the darkness.

After his escape he made his way back to the place where the diamonds had been dropped, finding them there undisturbed.

It was doubtless his intention to go on to civilization; but, finding the cave, his insane fancy made him make it his home; and there he had remained many months, with the dog that had strayed to him and made a home with him there.

As he had a fresh wound on his head, it was conjectured that he had been injured recently by a fall, and that when they had seen him riding on the back of the dog the animal was thus bringing him home to the cave.

Some of this, it will be seen, lacked the accuracy of positive knowledge, but the truth was not far from these surmises.

In the meantime, later, he regained his reason entirely; and then, strange to say, his life in that cavern under the hill back of the vaporous spring became as dim to him as a half-remembered dream.

The flames burning on the surface of the spring scared away the superstitious Pawnees, thus permitting the occupants of the cave to depart from it at their leisure, and without danger or molestation.

To-day it is noted as a mineral spring of peculiar properties, and has become famous as a health and pleasure resort.

More than once, since those memorable times, Buffalo Bill, Nellie Benton Ingalls and her husband, her father, and Bolivar have visited the place, watched the bubbling spring, set fire to the mineral gas rising to its surface, and explored with torches the strange stalactite cavern under the hill.

Bolivar, still worthy of his title of Boastful Bolivar, was accustomed for many a year to arrogate to himself all the heroism displayed during those hours of danger from Pawnees and Sioux, and to claim that but for him Buffalo Bill and all with him would have perished.

And to prove the truth of his bragging assertions he displayed a diamond of rare beauty given to him by the girl. It was the one thing he would never sell; and he always had a marvelous tale to tell of how it had been given to him by Nellie Benton in recognition of his courageous services.

THE END.

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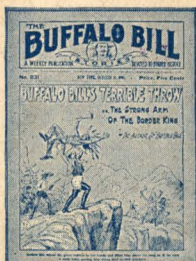
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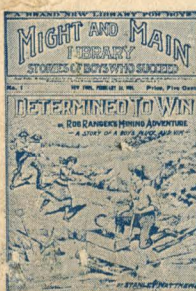
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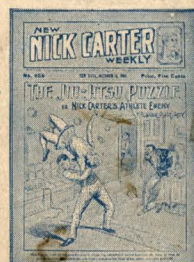


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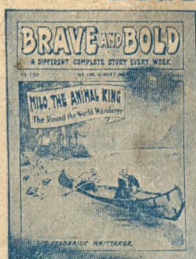
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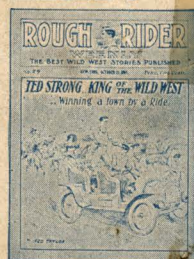
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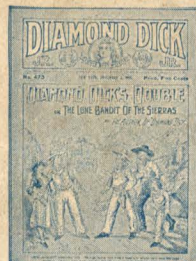
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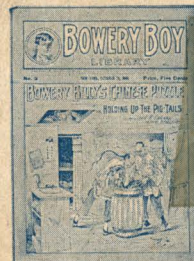
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